

## Everyday Leadership

1 Peter 5:1-5

October 27, 2013

Dan Hoffman

Disney's "Peter Pan" came out a surprising 60 years ago, in February of 1953, and has been redone so many times that I am certain almost all of us have seen it. If you haven't it is an exciting story about pirates and pixie dust and mystical islands in the sky, but really Peter Pan is a story of a boy who refuses to grow up.

Now whether this story was prophetic of what culture would become or was already a reality in the 50's I'm not sure, but the refusal to grow up has become an epidemic in Canada.

Today the delay of the responsibilities of adulthood, often called "a failure to launch" is almost anticipated with comical expectation. In 1904 – over a hundred years ago – the term "adolescence" was first used to describe the brand new, decade long transition from childhood to adult life. Prior to this "men" and "women" got jobs and had families when they were only teenagers. Adolescence was new then, but today it has been extended. Sociologists are now calling the 20's "the emerging adulthood years" as a way of recognizing that "growing up" is being pushed even further back.<sup>1</sup> But while this is an epidemic among young people in society, the refusal to take on responsibility in the church extends well beyond that.

[Pray – send out workers]

If you haven't already please open your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 5. This morning we have come to our last sermon in the series. And here Peter looks at what it means to be a leader in the Christian community. Look with me at chapter 5 verse 1:

[Read 1 Peter 5:1]

When it comes to the spiritual leadership of the church, Peter and the other New Testament authors give us several insights into what it means to be a leader. When they talk about these leaders they refer to them as elders or shepherd pastors or overseers; words which most commentaries agree were used interchangeably to describe the same people – people chosen by a local church to work together to discern where God wanted them to go.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thoughts in this paragraph adapted from New York Times post "What is it about 20-Somethings?" [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) accessed Oct 23, 2013.

They were responsible for teaching, making sure theological accuracy was preserved and most importantly they were responsible for making sure the church continued to passionately follow Jesus Christ.

And in this verse Peter describes himself as an elder and then speaks specifically to the elders in the churches he is writing to. And while these words may not hit you as surprising they are actually quite profound in that they speak to each of us here today regardless of whether you happen to be a leader in the church right now or not.

Here's what I mean: What Peter says in chapter 5 verse 1-5 is relevant to every Christian here, not just church leaders. Let me explain:

In the first century every Christian knew who Peter was because he was one of a few people specifically chosen to lead. But the first insight into spiritual leadership he gives comes out of the unbelievable humility with which he writes. Peter knew that leadership in the church was nothing like leadership in the world, and therefore the power of his position never got to his head.

Now that is an incredible thing to be able to say about anybody, but it is especially amazing because of who Peter was.

You see Peter was an apostle, in fact he was the number one apostle. He was the guy Jesus said

“you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

And yet Peter addresses the church as a “fellow elder” not Jesus’ number 1 guy. The Greek for “fellow elder” means an elder just like the rest of you guys – nothing special.

Now if you know Peter from reading the Gospels you know he wasn't naturally a humble guy. He was the “ear chopping”, “Jesus rebuking”, “dig your foot out of your mouth and add salt” disciple with all the answers. But Jesus didn't leave him that way. And as Peter watched Jesus for three years, listened to His teaching and ultimately when he received the Holy Spirit, he was changed to look like Jesus. And humility was a big part of that. It had to be, because Peter's God was the Servant Jesus who said:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42-45)

And then Jesus demonstrated this by going to the cross and dying for the sins Peter had committed. And Peter got it. He realized that leadership in the church wasn't about prestige, it wasn't tied to an attractive personality or natural talent and it didn't result in personal gain. Instead it was about humbly following the footsteps of Jesus.

And this is why in verse 2 Peter says:

[Read 1 Peter 5:2-3]

Peter urges leaders in Jesus' church to be shepherds of God's flock. And a good shepherd was someone who was willing to risk his life for the sheep under his care.

Peter's journey to understanding what it meant to be a shepherd came to a culmination on the night Jesus was betrayed. Luke tells us:

Then seizing him (Jesus), they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62)

This was step 1 in becoming a shepherd for Peter.

Have you been there? Have you been in a spot where instead of standing up for Jesus, instead of living in the way you know is right you caved in to fear and turned away from the One you know to be “the Truth” only to find Jesus’ loving eyes looking into your soul?

I have, and those moments have torn me up inside because I sit there thinking “after everything Jesus has done for me, after all the gifts He has given me I am still too weak to be what He wants me to be.

And I’m left feeling defeated and powerless and unworthy to be doing anything for Jesus at all.

And that’s how Peter felt as the tears welled up in his eyes and he ran from Jesus’ gaze. He was probably thinking “some *living stone* I am.” How is Jesus going to build His church with me? He needs rocks not a pile of silly putty!

But this isn’t where Peter’s story ended. And here is the first truth I really want you to grasp today. If you forget everything else remember this. Jesus didn’t go around looking for people who were rock solid to build His kingdom; He took people as fickle as Peter and turned them into the rocks He used to build His kingdom. Do you see the difference?

So how did it happen for Peter?...

Step two of becoming a shepherd leader happened after Jesus came back from the dead. Peter and the other disciples were out fishing when Jesus showed up and told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. And when they did they could hardly pull them in because they were so full. And Peter realized it was Jesus and jumped into the water and swam to shore.

And as they were eating breakfast Jesus looked at Peter with those same eyes and said three times: “If you love me feed My lambs. Take care of My sheep. Feed My sheep.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus took the self-preserving, three time denying Peter and turned him into the shepherd He wanted him to be. And that is what Jesus does with everyone He calls to Himself. He takes you from where you are and makes you into what He wants you to be. Can someone say amen?

See by the world’s standards Jesus’ business strategy here was shaky at best because He chose the wrong people. He didn’t choose highly intelligent people with great charismatic CEO type personalities to lead His church. Instead He chose fishermen like Peter – an entry level blue collar person with no education who was known for not being the sharpest tool in the shed.

---

<sup>2</sup> John 21:15-19

And God chose to hand the authority of His church over to people like this because they had encountered Jesus.

And this is the second thing we need to get today. First Jesus doesn't choose rocks, He makes rocks. And second, church leadership is not restricted to people who have leadership talent. It is restricted to people who have encountered Jesus.

The people Jesus wants to lead His church are people who have met Him and been transformed by the encounter – people whose old ways of living, their personality traits that were less than desirable have been changed so that now they look like Jesus. Not super-hero Christians who never sin, but people who like Peter are humbly able to become what He makes them.

...  
 Friends there are people in this room today who are the leaders Jesus wants, but who aren't leading. And there are other people here today and you have never thought of yourselves as leaders, you have never been involved in leadership at church, and perhaps you have even decided not to become members because you haven't wanted the responsibility of being involved in anything more than you currently are.

But you love Jesus. And Jesus is at work within you. You aren't any more perfect than Peter was, but you also aren't the same person you used to be. And this is the requirement of being a leader at Church.

Friends our church, Fort George Baptist, is in desperate need of people who will allow Jesus to work through them to lead this church. Did you know that of the hundred to hundred and twenty people who attend our church any given Sunday only about fifty people are members.

And most of those fifty have been serving the church for decades. So this morning if you are one of the other fifty to seventy people who call Fort George home, whether you've been here for 3 months or 30 years, I urge you to look into membership. This is the Sunday to decide to make a change.

Now some others of you have been attending here for years but haven't become members because you have never declared your obedience to Christ through believer's baptism. It's time to stop letting that be an excuse. Jesus instituted Baptism as an outward sign of the fact that you have chosen to live your life for Him. He said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-19)

Now we all agree that baptism doesn't save you – faith in Jesus saves you – but baptism isn't optional for Christians as though we can say “Jesus I want to follow You, but I want to start by telling You that I'm not going to do what You say.”

Friends, if you love Jesus and if you call Fort George Baptist your home church it is time for many of us to put off the Peter Pan attitude and grow up in our salvation. In chapter 2 Peter said

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:2-3)

If you've tasted Jesus don't stay babies, instead accept the responsibility of maturity and allow God to use you to lead His church.

...

If God is speaking to you today I want to encourage you to take action. After the service pick up one of the membership applications and church constitution that are out in the foyer, fill it out and bring it back to me or one of the deacons. And take the next step toward allowing God to use you here.

...

Alright, since we have a few minutes left and this is the last sermon in the series I want to shift gears now and sum up where Peter has brought us through the whole letter.

First, remember that Peter is writing this letter in about 60AD to Christians who have been expelled from Rome and forced to the very edges of the Empire because of their faith in Jesus. And he encourages them to boldly take on the suffering they are experiencing as they stand up for Christ. He says:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith... may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

When we stand up for Christ and suffer for it – whether that means being ridiculed at work, or called naïve and narrow minded at university or simply looked down on by our neighbours, Peter says when we endure and even joyfully embrace this we prove the genuineness of our faith.

But that is a really high calling. How are we supposed to be able to have the strength to do that? Isn't self-preservation a basic human characteristic?

Peter admits, yes on our own this is an impossible calling. But you aren't called to do this on your own. Instead we are people

who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood (1 Peter 1:2)

While we and Peter's readers have been rejected by the world God has chosen us through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and enabled to be obedient to Jesus. It is because the Spirit of God lives within us that we are able to stand.

But Peter says there is more. God hasn't just put His Spirit within us as individuals, He has called us collectively as the Church. He says of us together:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Words like these would have hit Peter's readers as powerful since they were viewed as anything but "chosen" by society around them. But this is what it means to come to Christ – it means that together we have become the special possession of God – it means if you are part of the Church you have been adopted into God's family.

But Peter doesn't leave it here. An identity like the one we have requires acting out. See God hasn't made us into a royal priesthood for nothing – instead He gave us our identities along with a new job or vocation. And that vocation is looking like Christ in the situation God has placed us.

Peter says it is no accident that you find yourself married to your spouse, working next to your coworkers, living in your country, studying at your school or attending your church. Even when those situations are less than ideal, and when you feel powerless in those situations, you are there on purpose.

And Peter empowered people who were seen as powerless by telling them, in spite of their situations they were to:

Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. (1 Peter 2:16)

What Peter called for was totally counter-cultural in the first century, and it is just as radical today. Outside of an encounter with Christ no one would ever consider it. Peter calls Christians to live for Christ by submitting to the situations of oppression we find ourselves in for the purpose of drawing our neighbours to Christ. Isn't that crazy?!

And so in chapter 2 he urged deported refugees to  
Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to... the emperor, as the supreme  
authority. (1 Peter 2:13)

Then he told men and women who were owned by other people  
Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not  
only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are  
harsh. (1 Peter 2:18)

And then he told women who lived in a culture where they were just one of their  
husband's possessions  
Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands (1 Peter  
3:1)

People stuck in these places in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would naturally have been  
depressed with where they were, but Peter says this isn't your true identity. In  
reality you are children of God and citizens in His kingdom. And because of this  
you have the choice to look different from those around you in society and  
instead:

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of  
doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day  
He visits us. (1 Peter 2:12)

Peter says if we arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ willingly suffering to live  
out a life that honours Him, our non-believing neighbours will come to a place  
where they willingly glorify God.

That is what Christianity is about. In a sentence Christians are people who have  
encountered the life transforming power of Christ and so choose to participate  
with Him in bringing salvation to the world around us. Amen?

And so I ask you, is this the reality you are living in? First are you someone who  
has encountered Jesus? Not "have you been to church for 50 years?" but has  
your life been turned right-side-up by the fact that God has chosen you become  
part of the temple that houses the very Spirit of God?

If yes then because the Holy Spirit lives within us when people look at us they be  
encounter Jesus. And at that point evangelism changes from telling people  
about Jesus to actually introducing people to Him.

Nikki and I have been reading Bible stories to Elliana, our two year old, for  
two years now. They are a regular part of our day. But one thing I am  
really concerned about with my own kids is that I don't want them to know  
everything about Jesus but never actually encounter Him – but it is easier  
to talk about introducing someone to Jesus than actually doing it.

And then something happened this week. We had been looking at Jesus' story in Luke 15 about the shepherd who had a hundred sheep but lost one. And then the shepherd left the 99 to search for the one who was lost.

A couple hours later Elliana ran up to me and said "Daddy I'm going to be the lost sheep and you be Jesus and come find me."

For a second I was caught off guard – it isn't every day I so physically put myself in Jesus' shoes – but then I grabbed the situation for what it was – an opportunity to introduce Elliana to Jesus.

And so she ran and hid behind the chair in her room where she always hides and I started searching everywhere. And as I searched I just started calling out and telling her how much I loved her and how badly I wanted to find her, and how important she was to me and how beautiful I thought she was. And when I found her I picked her up and she clung to me like she rarely does – she's not really a hugger. And I kissed her head and held her tight and she whispered up to me "I love you Jesus. Thank you for finding me."

Friends, if Jesus lives within you then whatever situation you find yourself in, whether that is out in the world or here at church, your job is to look like Jesus whatever the cost. Being a Christian isn't about us, about our failings or our talents, it is about being obedient to Jesus. Are you there?

My prayer for myself and for Fort George – and I hope this is your prayer as well – is that we will be a church full of people who look like Jesus because we have encountered Him face to face, and that out of this encounter we will go into the world in boldness and lead here at church in humility and in so doing be part of causing our world to glorify Christ.

Would you pray with me.  
[Pray – send out workers]