**Renewed Vision for 2020 Series**

**“Renewed Vision for Shepherding the Flock”**

**Introduction**

As we celebrate thirty years of ministry here at Christ Covenant we are focusing on a renewed vision for the elements of worship and ministry the Lord has ordained for His Church. We first considered a renewed vision for devotion to Christ as we discovered the overarching characteristic of the first Christians was that they “*continually devoting themselves*” to Christ. (Acts 2.42) Last week we looked at the early church to capture a renewed vision for gathering for worship.

**Renewed Vision for Shepherding the Flock**

This morning I want us to gain a vision for shepherding the flock. The metaphor of the people of God being sheep under the watchful care of the Lord as our Shepherd is used throughout Scripture. Psalm 23 is probably the most well known use of the metaphor. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.* (Ps.23.1-2) But to fully understand the metaphor one needs to understand sheep.

The sheep, for example, is the only animal in the world that can be totally lost within a few miles of its home.  Most animals have a God given instinct to find their way back home. But if a sheep is taken into unfamiliar territory, it becomes completely lost. It cannot find its way home. I’m not going to give you a lecture about sheep. You can do that for yourself but let me summarize by stating that sheep need constant attention. They get lost. They can't find water. They can't find food. They eat the wrong things. They roll over and die. They get hurt and give up. They can't defend themselves by running, kicking, biting, scratching or jumping. They are very vulnerable. Do you get the feeling God created sheep just to make a spiritual point? And here’s the point. *Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.* (Ps.100.3)

I believe if we are going to gain a vision for shepherding the flock we must being by understanding who we are and our need for a shepherd. The fact is all of us like sheep have gone astray each of us has turned to his own way. (Is.53.6) We often starve ourselves of spiritual nourishment. We often get hurt and give up. We lack the defenses to guard ourselves from the enemy. Basically, sheep are the perfect metaphor to describe who we are and our need for a shepherd.

**We Need a Shepherd**

We need a Shepherd who will leave the ninety-nine go after the one, which is lost, and search until he finds it. (Lk.15.4) We need a Shepherd that will lead us to green pastures and quiet waters. (Ps.23.2) We need a Shepherd who will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick. (Ez.34.16)

And that Shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ! Throughout the ages God has promised to send us such a Shepherd. In Isaiah He promised to send a Shepherd who would tend His flock, gather His lambs into His arms, carry us in His bosom, and gently lead us. (Is.40.11) In Ezekiel He promised to set over us one shepherd who would feed us. (Ez.34.23) In Micah He promised that a Shepherd would arise to shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, and His people would live securely because our Shepherd would be great to the ends of the earth. (Mic.5.4-5) Imagine the eternal Son of God willing humbled Himself to be our shepherd, to be our guide, our provider, and our protector.

Jesus as our Great Shepherd compassionately looked upon us as sheep without a shepherd. He saw that we were continually straying from the flock. As the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls Jesus came a dwelt among us and laid down His life for His sheep. Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd calls out our name and leads us back into His fold where we find rest and security. (Jn.10.11; Heb.13.17; Mk.6.34; IPt.2.25) The Lord is my Shepherd! I shall not want because all that I need is found in Him. If we desire a renewed vision for shepherding the flock we must have a renewed vision of Christ as our Shepherd.

**Under Shepherds**

Jesus our Great Shepherd cares for us so immensely that He appointed under shepherds in His church to shepherd His flock. These under shepherds are called elders, which are appointed in every church to equip believers for the work of ministry and to the build up of the body of Christ. (Acts 14.23; Eph.4.11-12) Christ’s gift to the church is Pastors and Shepherds. Their primary responsibility is to guard the flock and to shepherd the church of God, which Christ purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20.28)

Both the Apostle Paul and Peter exhort the elders to shepherd the flock of God. This is the elder’s primary responsibility. Our denomination calls the elders a “Session” but the Bible calls them “Shepherds.” The word “Session” means to sit or to sit in judgment. What every church needs elders that serve as shepherds instead of sitting in judgment. Whereas “Shepherds” care, lead, and feed the flock of God. Their ministry as shepherds should not be under compulsion, but willingly; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in their charge, but being examples to the flock. (IPt.5.1-3)

Christ Himself called Peter to be a shepherd when Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter responded each time, “Lord, You know I love you” and the Lord responded each time, “Shepherd My sheep.” (Jn.21.15-17) You see, the correct motive for shepherding the flock must be absolute love and devotion to Christ. Only love for Christ can be the proper motive for shepherding. Without the motivation of love for Christ it won’t take long until church will experience disappointed and disillusionment.

Like our Great Shepherd, under shepherds should know the sheep. An elder must be committed to moving past surface relationships to pursue a deeper understanding and a personal relationship with every person that is under his care. Under shepherds should lead the sheep. Elders must lead the church according to God’s Word, for God’s purposes, and through means that God has appointed. Under shepherds should feed the sheep by assuring that God’s people are growing in God’s Word. And under shepherds should protect the sheep by proving watchful care.

**Sustainable Shepherding**

But I believe for our church to experience sustainable shepherding we must seek to develop a church culture that has shepherding one another as a core value. If you are looking for the Pastor to do all the shepherding it won’t take long until the Pastor will be like Moses with the children of Israel overwhelmed and over burdened. (Ex.18.17) If you think shepherding requires the special classification of being an elder you will quickly experience an insufficient quality of care for God’s people. But if we together seek to develop a church culture that has shepherding one another as a core value we will discover a church where people experience brotherly care from the body of Christ.

**Shepherding One Another**

Let me share a few scriptures that describe what shepherding one another looks like.

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* *Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.* (Rom. 12.10-13)

*Show hospitality* to one another without grumbling. (IPt.4.9)

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*(Rom. 12.15)

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* (I Cor. 12.26-27)

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* (Phil. 2.3-4)

*Bear one another’s burdens.* (Gal.6.2a)

*Encourage one another.* (IThes.4.18)

*Instruct one another.* (Rom.15.14)

*Admonish one another.* (Col.3.16) “Admonish” has a bit of an edge to it, and that is sometimes necessary among people who love each other.

*Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.* (Heb.10.24)

*Confess your sins to one another.* (Js.5.16)

*Exhort one another every day . . . that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* (Heb.3.13)

*Pray for one another.* (Js.5.16)

Welcome*one another (or accept one another) as Christ has welcomed you.* (Rom.15.7) Our church should be a welcoming place. Our church should be an accepting place.

*Members should have the same care for one another.* (ICor.12.25)

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, taught what is known as the “Priesthood of all believers.” What Luther taught was that all believers have the right and authority to read, interpret, and apply the Word of God and the church didn’t need a special priestly class or the priesthood to do those things for them. What I suggesting is the all believers have the right and authority, even the brotherly obligation, to shepherd one another in the church. We don’t need a special ordained class or clergy to shepherd. We should be shepherding one another. “All believers Shepherds.”

You don’t need a Pastor or elder to *bear one another’s burdens.* To encourage one another. To instruct one another. To stimulate one another to love and good deeds. To confess your sins. To pray for one another.To show hospitality to one another. Like our Great Shepherd, we must be committed to moving past surface relationships to pursue a deeper personal relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must be willing to lead one another into God’s Word. We must have a watchful eye for one another and be willing to help one another during times of temptation, worry, or discouragement.

**Closing Thoughts**

As I come to a close I want to ask if there is someone here today who has gone astray and the Good Shepherd is calling your name. He has left the ninety-nine to search for you. If so allow the Lord to lift you on His shoulders and let us rejoice that the one who was lost has been found. (Lk.15.5-6)

Can you say today, “”The Lord is My Shepherd – I shall not want”? Are you resting in the comfort and care of our Great Shepherd? If not, surrender what ever is hindering you from resting in Christ and come to the Good Shepherd.

I’m asking you to pray for the elders of our church as they seek the best ways to serve you as the Lord’s under shepherds.

As we move into this thirtieth year of ministry here at Christ Covenant I’m challenging all of us to seek the Lord for a renewed vision for shepherding the flock. I’m challenging all of us to ask the Lord to develop in our church a culture that has shepherding one another as a core value.