

QUALITY SHEPHERDING

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 11th May 2003

Ezekiel 34: 1-10, John 10: 11-15 “Quality Shepherding”

(There were variations between 07:00 and 09:00 versions. Some notes below are in point form, yet are quite clear especially when read together with the Scripture passages.)

Introduction:

- Focus today: Quality shepherding!
- May at first seem irrelevant but I intend to make the relevance clear

John 10: 11-15:

- Jesus as the good shepherd (role model)
- He knows his sheep, and they know him
- Life for the sheep - contrasted with hired person
- Indicative of personal investment - made clear by the fact that God was so “invested in us” that he came right into our midst!

General input:

- Important biblical model for leadership and care of God’s people:
- The shepherd who leads his sheep
- Middle Eastern pattern: Not of a shepherd watching from a distance nor following behind, but leading in front
- A model especially stressed in OT period
- Applied to the kings of Israel and their officials, and to the priests:
- To lead the people - as caretakers, on behalf of God
- To nurture the “flock” - lead to best pastures
- To protect from danger
- Strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays, search for the lost and scattered
- If we can get over our own reluctance to the analogy of being sheep, we can learn much here.

Ezekiel 34: 1-10

- Frequent theme of prophets - warning to those who abused “caretaker” role, who failed to do what true shepherds are called to do and instead abused their power and influence, using the flock to look after their own needs.
- Warning: Judgment! God will hold them accountable, (and as stated specifically in this passage) we have a warning / assurance from God that those who abuse, will be removed from influence, and will no longer be able to use the community of faith for their own interests.

Remember that all leadership (social, religious, political) seen in same light - not secular society such as western society today. King: A regent, under authority of THE REGENT - God, the King of heaven and earth. All authority is God's, and those who use it in ANY capacity, do so in caretaker role for God (whether they acknowledge it or not).

That also ties up with our Christian theology: Everything in life is within the ambit of God.

Hence how Christian people live, in every sphere of life, is important.

Re abolition of slavery: Assumed and accepted social practice, even in NT times - exhortations to slaves not to cheat their master, and to slave owners not to mistreat their slaves. Not all slavery of that time was brutal. Yet there was a growing understanding within the Christian community that even if all slave owners were benevolent (!), it is not appropriate for any person to "own" another - only God has that right!

Yet we must beware a continuing "slave-owner mentality" - behaving as if we own people, or manipulating others for our own ends.

Don't be too self-righteous - this behaviour is common in every field of human life! (Elaborate)

Thus all of us, with any influence over others are accountable before God for how we use that authority. Examples include children, pupils, employees, colleagues, and national citizens; whether authority is exercised over 1 person or 1,000 persons)

[I was reminded recently of Desmond Tutu's comments some years back, particularly directed at Daniel arap Moi, President of Kenya... and repeated more recently with regard to Robert Mugabe, and reminiscent of his words over the years to various leaders in SA:

"The people of Africa have been failed by their leaders".]

Relevance:

- To all in any position of authority over others:
- I need to question how I use that authority, and in whose interests
- Am I aware that I too, am under the authority of God?
- All of us: Pray for, support and encourage our leaders
- This is so esp. in the household of faith
- Includes elected leaders of parish, parish clergy and staff, and all leadership
- We are led by a council, including lay persons and clergy (elaborate)
- In our Diocese the Bishop leads us, but we have a Synod to govern us.
- (Elaborate on Council and Synod – no single person has all authority within the church, but there are ways of holding one another accountable in their areas of authority & responsibility.)

- All of us: Challenge those same people (gracefully), if it is perceived that they are deviating from the biblical model for leadership and “shepherding the flock”
- Enable them to do the kinds of things that will provide quality shepherding
- Time to pray, to read and reflect;
- Time to do what they are called to, esp. if it is to lead and teach, without being bogged down in non-essentials, and to enable the people of God to do the ministries to which they are called
- The symbol of “the shepherd’s crook” still used by the Bishop – a symbol of authority, leadership and servant-hood. Power, used appropriately, and in accordance with the role of servant-leader.

... Brief mention made of ...

Another model of Community of Faith:

- 2 models in scripture:
 - (1) Shepherd & Flock
 - (2) Body of Christ (Paul – Cor.)
- 2nd model developed strongly in NT; briefly list key points

Conclusion: Take this awareness and these concerns into our prayers:

- Stretching a point, but ... There is a sense in which the WHOLE community can be viewed as a “shepherd” with an obligation to seek the lost, bind up the broken-hearted, nourish the sheep, etc.
- Therefore need constantly to seek the most effective ways of being the people of God in our community
- Pray for all in positions of authority over others - re how they exercise authority
- Pray for those who are leaders and teachers in our midst

Experience shows that where the church follows these God-given models, it flourishes; and that where it fails to do so, or allows abuse, it suffers!

PRAY THAT OUR CHURCH FLOURISHES!