

*Based on *1 Peter 5:1-4. Wisdom for “Church Work”*

**incarnational translation below*

When I was just starting out in the ministry in my early twenties, and having a bit of a hard time, one of my mentors offered words of wisdom that remain relevant to this day: *Keep the faith. Do the job. Ask for help.*

You can almost hear the author of our Lesson today shouting *Amen, Sister!* from two thousand years away.

Keep the faith, our author is saying, to a community trying to survive through major generational shifts and trying to thrive in a culture of despair. *Keep the faith*, our author is saying, even through the struggles. In fact, your struggles are actually a window into the struggles of Jesus. Don't seek them out, in a pseudo-martyrdom, but don't avoid them, either, because they are just as a fact of life in the world as it is, rather than the world as we wish it was.

It's not all suffering and hardship, either, our author reminds us. *Keep the faith*, our author is saying, and you, too, will glimpse visions of the Beloved Community manifesting in your midst, like last night at the More Light Thanksgiving where *fifty* young people find a welcome and an affirmation they never thought they would find in a church. One family even drove up from Winchester for the event! *Keep the faith*, our author is saying, and an eternal crown of glory will rest upon you and grant you a peace that passes all understanding.

Do the job, our author is saying, to a community that, like us, is worried and burdened by many things. Not a job in the corporate sense of fee-for-service or talent-for-treasure, mind you. In fact, calling service to the church a *job* may be the worst thing we have ever done for any kind of ministry, whether it be ordained ministry as a pastor for which we do actually get paid or the so-called “volunteer” ministries of ruling elder or deacon or ushering or teaching our children or singing in the choir or volunteering in the church office or serving food for the community meal or just plain showing up to worship any given Sunday. Once the thrill is gone and the honeymoon has subsided, if it really is about *doing a job*, instead of, *responding to a calling*, the church can become just one more organization that seems to suck up our precious time and soak up our precious money.

Don't let that happen, our author is saying, to his church and to ours. Keep coming back to that crown of glory, to that halo of hope that just wants to settle upon you and fill you with peace. Let this be about light and love and meaning and hope, our author is saying. This is *God's* work in the end. And that work is all about grace.

At the end of the day, every single bit of the very faithful work of our spreadsheets and our budgets and our strategic plans and our staffing rationales and our communications effort is in service to the much broader vision of church captured in our Lesson today: a holy, humble surrender to a divine guidance that is even beyond our capacity to understand let alone control, and that we eventually simply accept with gratitude and awe in a spirit of love for God and one another.

The good news is that our newest members get it! Divine guidance, gratitude, love, and awe are, in the end, what have brought them to us today. It has been such a gift to hear directly from them, unprompted, why they want to unite with this community. *I walk in the door*, says one of our new members, *and I don't feel like I have to be anyone other than who I actually am. I grew up with a God of judgment*, says another. *I think I can heal from that here*. Our new members from Minneapolis say, *From the window of our downtown apartment, we could see the fires burning after the murder of George Floyd. We want to be part of a congregation that cares about racial justice*. And another says, *the children! Wow! They make everything worth it*.

And so they do. Which is why we will always ask for help to carry on this ministry of radical hospitality, holistic spirituality, and engaged compassion we call SPC. Not as a job to burden the faithful, but as a celebration of meaning, hope, and belonging. In our own generational shifts, in our own desire to thrive in a culture of despair, *this ministry matters!* And because of you, our newest members and our long-standing members alike, with the guidance of our shepherding God, we are well on our way to the vision of Living Hope that is ours today.

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**1 Peter 5:1-4*

I have a special concern for you who are leaders like I am.
I know the unique insights your leadership offers you
into how Christ's sufferings connect with the sufferings of the people.
I know the thrill of watching a vision of Beloved Community
breaking into our present, even as we await its fullness in eternity.

I also know the temptation of treating your leadership in the community
as just another job: a task on your ever-increasing to-do list, even a burden.
I know the anxiety of being a control-freak trying to line up all of the ducks in a row.
As if *that* is what it means to be the church!

Jesus is trying to show us a different way.

In this community, *God* is our Shepherd,
tenderly nudging us toward greater faithfulness from one moment to the next.
We who lead the community are meant to mirror that divine guidance,
with humility, grace, and gratitude.
When we do this, an eternal crown of glory settles upon us, like a halo,
and the ministry just flows ... from God, through us, and into the world!

"Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places" (Cosgrove and Edgerton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching, 62).*