

“The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

As most of our members are no doubt aware by now, the call we extended to Pastor Fraser Pearce has been returned. While this is disappointing, we trust the wisdom and guidance of the Lord of the Church, as He leads and directs all things for the good of His Church and for the good of this congregation. We will be going through the call process once again, seeking God’s grace and asking for His blessing as we look for the shepherd He has prepared for us. As the Lord promises: *“And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.”* (Jeremiah 3:15, ESV)

The church has been given a special authority to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. We call that special authority, *The Office of the Keys*. To administer that office, the Lord has given His Church the gift of pastors. This text speaks to us of the priests (or pastors) of the Old Testament in contrast with the perfect priesthood of Christ. Blessed is the church which finds a good and faithful pastor to shepherd the flock. Yet we know that all earthly pastors are going to be imperfect, especially if we see them in contrast to the way someone once described the perfect pastor. It may be a bit dated, but you’ll get the idea:

The perfect pastor preaches exactly 20 minutes, then sits down. He condemns sin, but never hurts anyone's feelings. He works from 8 am to 10 pm in every type of work, from preaching to custodial service. He makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books regularly, has a nice family, drives a good car, and gives \$30 a week to the church. He also contributes to every good cause that comes around. He is 26 years old, and has been preaching for 30 years. He is tall and short, thin and heavy set, and handsome. He has one blue eye and one brown. His hair is parted down the middle—one side dark and straight, the other brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with youth and spends all his time with older folk. He spends all his time with a straight face because he has a sense of humour that keeps him seriously devoted to his work. He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is never out of the office.

I don't know of any pastors who meet those standards. For that matter are there any pastors who truly meet the biblical qualifications of a pastor? St Paul said: *“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”* (1 Timothy 3:1–7, ESV)

While we may see these qualities in many pastors we know that none of them are perfect. There was a time when people viewed pastors with respect and reverence. But today, more people tend to think of clergyman as money hungry, power hungry, uncaring individuals who are only out to serve themselves, not the people of the church. People think of pastors in terms of the clergymen who have sexually abused young boys. They think of pastors who have been disgraced because they have had an affair. They think of pastors the way they are portrayed in tv shows—a bit silly, not all that bright, and not always with it.

Pastors aren't perfect—but they also aren't as bad as they are often made out to be. Like all the people of the church, they are sinners. Our text reminds us that all of the priests of the past had to offer sacrifices for their own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. *For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests*, our text says. Pastors make mistakes, just like

everyone else. They have our strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else. They face the same temptations and struggle with them, just like everyone else. And they need forgiveness, just like everyone else. That is why all of us—pastors and people—need the ministry of the only perfect pastor, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the perfect pastor. Our text says: ***For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*** He doesn't sin like other pastors. He doesn't have the weaknesses or make the mistakes of other pastors. He does have all the qualities we would expect of the perfect pastor. He is a great preacher, who speaks God's word with wisdom and authority. His words of wisdom could silence the Pharisees, as we heard in the Gospel lesson today. He teaches us that Word in its truth and purity, for He Himself is God. He is a caring, concerned pastor of His people. We saw that in our Gospel lesson too, as He defies the rules of the Pharisees and heals a man on the Sabbath. He then encourages us to show love to those in need, like the crippled, the blind and the lame. This message is repeated in our Epistle lesson as we are told: ***“Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”*** (Hebrews 13:1–3, ESV)

We see this loving care for others repeated again and again in the ministry of Jesus. He deals with people in all their times of hurt and need, giving Himself to serve His people, even to the point of exhaustion. In Christ we have a pastor who gives us the comfort we need in our moments of sorrow or fear, as He assures us of His love and of His power to help and save His people. In Christ we have a pastor who not only announces that we are forgiven, but who is the very source of our forgiveness. As our text says: ***He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.*** He gives Himself as the perfect Sacrifice—as the ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29, ESV) He gives Himself for His people in the greatest act of ministry, dying in our place upon the cross, and then overcoming death itself in His glorious resurrection to continue to minister to His people.

That perfect pastor still ministers among us. He is with us now, still speaking to us through the words of Scripture. He is with us, surrounding us with His love and care. He is with us, to help, encourage and strengthen His people. But He also ministers through the under-shepherds or pastors He has given to the church. As we learn through the Holy Spirit's words to St. Paul: ***“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*** (Ephesians 4:11–16, ESV)

The only Perfect Pastor carries out His ministry as He gives pastors to the church, to help God's people grow in their faith and life. He knows that every pastor—each and every one of them—works in weakness and imperfection, but they work in and through the help and strength of the Holy Spirit. We can be sure that Christ, our perfect High Priest, will continue to work with us to bless all we undertake together as pastor and people in His church. As we look to the next call, we pray for a servant faithful to his calling as the undershepherd of the Good Shepherd. We pray that all pastors will strive, with the help of God, to be what all God's people should be—imitators of Christ. We pray that all our pastors may teach, preach, encourage, admonish, help and support, pray and care for God's people in such a way that we will see Christ at work in them and in the church. We pray that they will always point us to the Saviour who died for us on the cross and who lives to bring us to the life that we have through faith in Him. God grant us a pastor soon; a faithful servant of the Word! But we also pray that we may heed the words of our Epistle today as the Spirit speaks to tell us: ***“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*** (Hebrews 13:17, ESV) When we all, pastor and people together, seek to fulfill our calling as God's people we know that the Lord of the Church, who gave Himself for His church will continue to work for our good. As He does, we can be sure that we will see God do great things among us here at Foothills. Amen.