

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Text: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Be Prepared

We all know the Boy Scout motto, “Be Prepared.” We try to be prepared for many things in life. When we are in school we study, so that we are prepared for a test. At work it seems that nothing goes exactly the way that we planned it, so we prepare ourselves for the unexpected. We buy insurance for our homes and cars, just in case something happens. I was very happy that I was prepared with homeowner’s insurance this past week. I looked on my roof a few weeks ago and noticed that the winter snow and ice devastated it. When I got the estimate, I was very thankful for my insurance.

We prepare ourselves for so many things in life, but how prepared are we for questions about our faith? Sometimes our kids ask questions. Did you ever find yourself telling them to ask their mother, their Sunday School teacher or their pastor? A friend or coworker might ask something specific about what we as Lutherans believe or why you go to church each Sunday. After a great loss, someone might ask you how you can cope.

Sometimes people don’t demand an answer from us in a positive way. They are looking to pick a fight or put us down. That is what Peter had in mind in our text. Christians were being slandered and mocked for their faith. There were many false accusations. Because they celebrated the Lord’s Supper at something called a “Love Feast,” people accused them of both cannibalism and immorality. Later Nero would blame them for the burning of Rome.

How would they give an answer for the hope that they had? How prepared are we to give an answer when people ask us about our hope? That is what I would like to look at with you today.

I. Being prepared begins with sanctifying Christ in our hearts.

If we are going to give a good defense of our faith, our hearts need to be in the right place. So Peter writes in the beginning of verse 15, *"In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord."* Giving a good defense of our faith begins with having Christ as Lord of our hearts.

What does it mean to have Christ as Lord of our hearts? Peter writes about that in chapter 1. In 1:3,8 he writes, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade...Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, You believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of Your souls."* That is what it means to sanctify Christ in our hearts. We have trust in Him as our Savior. We love Him as our Savior. We rejoice in the certainty of our salvation through Him that our sins are forgiven, He is with us, and we will be with Him forever in the joys of Heaven. To have Christ as Lord of our hearts is to have this living hope in Him as our Savior inside of us.

That's how the early Christians set Christ apart in their hearts. When Peter wrote this letter to these churches, they were about to endure severe persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Many of them would be brought before judges; others would be martyred because of their faith. If those people had not set Christ apart in their hearts, if they didn't trust that He had truly risen from the dead and that they would be with Him eternally, they would have quickly given up the faith when persecution came. But they were ready to give up everything because there was nothing as valuable as having Christ as their Savior. They had a living hope in Him. In Him they had an inheritance that could never perish, spoil or fade (1:4) which had been won by Christ's precious blood, which He shed for them on the cross.

One of the best examples of this is Polycarp, who was the pastor of Smyrna, which is in modern day Turkey. He had been instructed by the Apostle John in the Christian faith, and was a very beloved pastor. In 155 he was arrested and tried on the charge of being a Christian. When the governor urged him to save his life by cursing Christ, he replied: ***"Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"*** Shortly thereafter he was burned at the stake because of his faith. He knew Jesus as his Savior, and was prepared to give an answer, even though it meant his death.

As Christians our hearts need to be set on Christ. Our faith in Christ can never be something that we take half-heartedly. Yes, we believe in Jesus, but we don't want to overdo it. Christ needs all of our heart. Peter writes that it was He who suffered for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. He gave up everything for us. He saved us through baptism. There is nothing half-hearted in what He does for us. How could we ever love Him in a half-hearted way? When we have that living hope in our hearts, we are prepared

- II. So Peter writes, *"Always be prepared to give a defense of everyone who asks to give reason for the hope you have."*

The early Christians would soon be asked for give a defense of their hope. They would even be called before judges on account of their faith. The earliest Christians teachers are called "apologists" because their works refuted the false notions about Christianity, and showed what our hope in Christ is. Hundreds of years later when Martin Luther was told to recant of his teachings at Worms, he answered, ***"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by clear reason, I cannot and will not recant, for it is neither safe nor right to act against one's conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."*** Throughout the years, millions of Christians have stood ready to give a defense of their faith to the world.

At times we might feel timid or afraid. But when Christ is set apart in our hearts as Lord, when we have a living hope in Him, we will always be prepared. A Christian who has a living hope in Christ, cannot help but want to give an answer about our faith, and share the hope that we have within us. We are a little like Jesus when He stood before Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas asked him plainly, *"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Living God?"* It was within Jesus' rights to remain silent, and He probably would have gone free had He remained silent. But He had to answer that question. He said, *"I am."* As Christians, we can't help but to confess Christ as our Savior. In Matthew 10:17-20 Jesus warns His people that they will be handed over to governors and kings and be called on to make a defense of their faith, but He also gives a wonderful promise that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say.

- III. Finally, when you give a defense of your faith, do it in with gentleness and respect.

No one wants to be hit over the head with a Bible. We want to share the Gospel as someone would share a new product that they just found, as good news, not as something that we want to argue about. Paul was an excellent example in our first lesson this morning. When He brought the Gospel to Athens, he didn't argue with the people or make them feel like fools for worshiping the wrong gods. He appealed to their reason and understanding as he called them to repentance. He dealt with them in a very gentle and respectful way. A kind word or deed goes a lot farther in sharing our hope in Christ, than harsh and threatening words. Peter even writes that such a kind and respectful way of sharing our hope will put to shame anyone who slanders us and our faith. A humble way is the best way to share our hope.

As in Peter's day we are still called on to give a reason for our hope in many ways today. We need to be prepared for such times. We will be prepared when we set Christ apart as Lord in our hearts, by having a living hope in the salvation that He has won for you. Then we will be ready to always give an answer for the hope inside of us to everyone who asks. May God give each of us such a living hope, and bless our witness, that many more will share in our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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