

May 25, 2014
Easter 6

"Be Ready to Share Your Hope in Christ"

1 PETER 3:15-22

But 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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For 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, ¹⁹ through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who 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, ²¹ and 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, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

It has been estimated that during your lifetime here on this earth you will have the opportunity to meet about 10,000 new people. What if you could share your hope in Christ with only ten people and those ten people then shared this hope with another ten people. Within five generations or 125 years, over 800 million people will have heard this message of hope and with one more generation this message would be shared with over 8 billion people, the current population of the world in which we live.

You have met a lot of new people in your lifetime here on this earth. Every person you meet becomes an opportunity to share the hope you have in Christ. The people to whom Peter was writing this letter were Christians who were scattered and persecuted for their faith. Wherever they went they carried with them this hope in Christ that the world could not offer. Within a few generations they transformed the Roman Empire.

The motto for the United States Coast Guard is "Semper Paratus" which means always prepared. Peter says to us this morning "Always be prepared." "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

The opportunities will come

"But always in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you..." We set Jesus apart in our hearts as someone very special to us so that we will always be ready to give an answer. What do you do with a beautiful bouquet of flowers that someone gives you? Do you put them on a shelf in the garage, or hide them in a closet? No, you put them on display in a prominent position such as the dining room table or coffee table. I want Jesus Christ as Lord to be on prominent display in my heart. We tend to talk about what is closest to our hearts. If my heart is preoccupied with what this world offers me, then I will talk about that to my friends, and neighbors

and family members. If Jesus fills my heart and life as my Lord and God and Savior then words about him will flow from my mouth. As Jesus said, it is from the abundance of the heart that mouth speaks.

In Ephesians 3 the Apostle Paul has this amazing prayer for the Christians in Ephesus where he asks the Holy Spirit to help them have more of Jesus in their hearts and lives. "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

The words of Saint Patrick's hymn come to mind. "My Christ is with me, and before, behind, beneath, above -- and more. Christ's on my left, Christ's on my right -- there when I sit, and when I fight. Whatever I may take to hand, Christ's there -- when I'm asleep, or stand. Christ's where I rise, when every day I read His Word and to Him pray. When I'm discussed, He's in the heart -- He's in the mouth, right from the start. He's in the eye of all who see and hear the actions done by me."

The Apostle Paul said "For me to live is Christ!" Is it too much to ask? Can this be my life? Oh, yes it can be! Jesus as Lord and loving Savior filling my thoughts when I wake in the morning, with me when I read my Bible and pray, in my mind as I drive down the freeway, when I talk to people I know and those I don't know. That's not some far off dream and illusion. This is who I am. I am a Christian and my heart is set on Christ.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." We have hope, not the hope of this world that says, "I hope things will work out for me after I die." Ours is what Peter calls a living hope based on Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The nail marks in the hands of Jesus are the source of our hope. They are more real to us, than the world we see around us.

My sins are real. They stare me in the face and they stare you in the face also. They are ugly. They deserve eternal death in hell. The deeper you dig into yourself the more ugliness and idolatry and faithfulness you uncover. The hands of Jesus are also real. The wounds pronounce your sin is forgiven and paid in full. You have the living hope that comes with being God's child. "Goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. How can I not share this living hope that beats inside of me and makes me who I am. I will meet 10,000 new people in my lifetime. How can I not share this hope with them?

I can't be a bull in a china closet when it comes to sharing my hope. I have to know what I believe, but I also have to take the time to know the people whom I meet and understand what they believe. Peter gives us these directions. "But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." Jesus had compassion on people who came to him. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Oh, to be sure, Jesus

was firm with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He was bold with the truths about himself, but always with love. We don't want to give an excuse to dismiss us and the message of hope we have to offer.

Norm Larson tells the story of being on the beach at Guadalcanal. Several Marines had dug a deep hole for refuge from the bombs. As the bombs began exploding all around them, one terribly frightened soldier asked if anyone could pray the 23rd Psalm. Norm said the 23rd Psalm. That was his opportunity to share the reason for the hope we have.

The hope we have is real

The hope we have in Christ is real because it is centered who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Peter fills our cup of hope and causes it to overflow by directing our attention to Jesus. Our suffering in this life for Jesus pales in comparison to the suffering Jesus went through for us. "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God." Our hope is real because Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior died for our sins. The very Son of God died for our sins and the sin of the world. Jesus died once for all. Some people believe that after we die we have to suffer for sins we committed in this life. When tragedy strikes people cry out to God, "What have I done wrong that you are punishing me?" Jesus died once for all. His payment for sin was for the whole world.

How do I know this suffering for sin was done personally for me? It says he died "the righteous or the unrighteous." Who are these unrighteous people? We only have to single out a brief moment from this past week and put it under the scrutiny of God's law to realize, "I am among those who are unrighteous." This past week I was reading in the book of Luke where Jesus says, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight." Yes, Jesus died the righteous for the unrighteous, the just for the unjust, the godly for the ungodly, the pure for the impure, the Son of God for sinners.

Jesus is foremost in your heart and foremost on your lips because he was raised to life by the Holy Spirit. "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." I know the Father raised Jesus from the dead. I know the Jesus raised himself from the dead. Here it says the Holy Spirit raised him from the dead. Paul was not afraid to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection to the skeptics in Athens. He said, "He has given proof of this to all men by raising Jesus from the dead." How fearlessly the early church bore witness to the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Perhaps you feel as I do that I am only taking baby steps when it comes to bearing witness to what my eyes of faith have seen in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Do you want to be filled even more with Christ so that you will speak from the abundance of your heart? Oh, I know you do. Peter tells you that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison including those people who perished in the great world flood. This past week they discovered a huge dinosaur bone in South America. It wasn't just dinosaurs that perish in the great world flood. It was people, lots of people. The souls of people who die without Jesus go to a place of darkness, the place of Satan and his evil angels. When Jesus arose from the dead, he descended into this world of darkness, these spirits in prison, and proclaimed his victory over them. Jesus' victory proclamation is our victory

proclamation.

Will you allow Peter to fill your cup of hope even more full so that it overflows even more? Oh, I know you will let him do that for you. He compares the water in your baptism to the waters of the great world flood. He says that "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, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also not the removal of dirt from your body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God." The waters of the flood destroyed the world, but by the hand of God they gently lifted up the ark and protected Noah and his family. Baptism saves you. It has connected you to Christ. It has buried you with Christ. Water removes dirt from the body but baptism washes away sin. Jesus told his disciples to share the hope of salvation with all people and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Want even more hope in your life that makes you eager to share what you have with others? Then listen to even more of what Peter tells you about Jesus. He says, "Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand -with angels, authorities and powers in the submission to him." It's OK dear Christian to share your hope that your life is in the hands of Jesus. This is real to you. This is what your life is made of. How many hundreds or even thousands of new people will you still meet in your lifetime? All these opportunities are in front of us to share this hope with people we have not yet met and also those people we have come to know. Amen.