

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**1 Peter 3:15-22** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, **16** having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. **17** For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

**18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, **19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. **21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

### “Hope Defended”

Amanda had done her research. She didn't want to have any old science fair project. She wanted it to be something she cared about. Something she could be passionate about. So she chose the Axolotl, a small amphibian from Central Mexico. And she didn't just rip things off the internet. She learned her subject until she could summarize the key information in her own words. She didn't just click print on her computer. She came up with her own pictures and diagrams.

Amanda soon discovered that not everyone will always share your passion. You can care deeply about a topic or a creature. You can think it is the greatest subject to dive into deeply. You can go on and discuss it with anyone who cares to listen. You can be ready and willing to share your passion. But once the science fair actually kicked off, after the students were done setting everything up and get their boards ready to be viewed, some of the other students started to wander by. Jeremy just walked past, paused briefly as he glanced at her display with a quick motion of his head and then kept moving. Breanne had a slightly different reaction. She walked right up and then let out a squeal: 'Ewww! What is that?' The pictures of Amanda's beautiful adopted amphibian took Breanne by surprise. She determined the animal was just plain gross and didn't want to make any more time for it or whatever Amanda had to say. Finally, the judges came. The first one might have been another student's dad or a teacher from one of the other schools. He seemed very serious. Just asking basic factual questions. Trying to make sure Amanda actually did all the work, probably. Then, when Ms K the librarian came by, she really finally had someone who seemed genuinely interested. She tried to contain her excitement as she explained the axolotl wasn't just fascinating because it is rare and only lives in isolated areas of central Mexico. Not only does it have fascinating features and rare qualities. But it can even

regenerate. And not just limbs, but even some tissues like eyes and heart. It's such a unique and fascinating creature.

Peter gives Christians a pretty amazing project. Peter begins this section of Scripture by telling us: **"in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."** (1 Peter 3:15 ESV) Christ is special to God's people. We give him the place of priority in our lives. That means people will be curious. They might even inquire of you about the place Christ has in your life. It won't always be flattering or complementary. They might ask questions just to mask their ridicule and mockery. They might be genuinely interested. We can't always control how people handle the hope we have inside us. But we can decide whether we want to respond to them by ignoring, insulting or instructing them. We can ignore opportunities and challenges. We can insult people when they are unkind or ugly. Or we can instruct. We can do everything in our ability to defend the hope that God placed inside our hearts.

### **1) Set aside Christ for special purpose in your life**

After working through this book of the Bible for a few weeks, it is helpful to go back and recall that the Apostle Peter wrote this book for a group of Christians who were suffering. Persecution was challenging their faith and causing them to question so many things. So Peter wrote originally to encourage them to remain faithful and conduct themselves in a uniquely Christian way in this challenging situation.

Peter's words are just as important for us today, nearly 2,000 years later. When Christian morals are declining and Christian beliefs come under attack, we tend to retreat. Under pressure, one of our natural tendencies is to grow timid. We get quiet about our faith. We are afraid of stirring up more trouble. We don't want any negative attention. So we leave our hope in Christ defenseless.

Which is a little ironic, I think. Because we are getting more and more vocal about other areas of our lives. The last time someone got in touch with you because they were really worked up, was it a spiritual issue? The last time your blood got boiling, was it because someone was disrespecting your God? Someone shared a YouTube video with you they were really excited about. Was it a devotion? Someone forwarded you a fascinating article you just had to read. Was it applying the Bible to your life? And I can't really say I blame you if you are really confused right now and at least a little bit agitated. No one really knows what's going on. I won't claim to have all the answers. Anyone who does claim to be any sort of expert just becomes a target. We have lots of opinions without a lot of facts.

That's just the state of the world today. But here's where Peter would tell you and me that we are missing out on a golden opportunity. Our defensiveness about all kinds of issues miss out on the bigger, more important issue. Peter sets us this section by starting out: **"Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."** (1 Peter 3:14,15) By the way we react to the news and local events, we've effectively moved Christ out of the place of priority in our hearts.

The times we do actually stand up for our faith too often takes unfortunate tactics. Since we do it when we are discussing politics and policies, we get defensive when we bring up our faith. We go from leaving our hope defenseless to being defensive. From ignoring opportunities to insulting opposing viewpoints. Ask my wife and she will tell you that I subscribe to too many magazines and buy too many books. But paging through the most recent issue of Christianity Today this week, an advertisement for book caught my attention. The title read "Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics." Don't worry. I didn't buy that book. Yet. But I think the point is clear enough by the title.

Too often Christians are stereotyped as bigoted and intolerant. Now if that is because people don't care for what the Bible teaches about sexuality and sin or claim that marriage is just a piece of paper, we should gladly wear the badge of speaking the truth from God's Word even if it isn't popular. After all Ephesians instructs us to speak "**the truth in love.**" (Ephesians 4:15) To not stand up for the truth of God's Word would be to turn our backs on our responsibility to God. But Peter tells us to provide a defense of our Christian hope. Here's how: "**yet do it with gentleness and respect.**" (1 Peter 3:15 ESV) Christians are often judged unfairly and labeled with inaccurate stereotypes. But if you are known more for being a jerk than sharing your hope with gentleness and respect, you are doing it wrong. Peter even goes so far in verse 17 to tell us that "it is better to suffer for doing good." And we should prefer to have a good conscience in the way we interact with non-Christians so they will be embarrassed by the way they treat us instead of us being embarrassed by the way we try to defend Christ. (1 Peter 3:16)

## **2) Christ is Lord because of what he did**

The proper way to defend hope is to go back to our number one goal as Christians. We want to put Christ in first place in our hearts. Peter then goes on to explain why we don't have to defend ourselves with defensiveness and insulting conduct. Here's how he sets it up: "**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.**" (1 Peter 3:18) Jesus suffered abuse he never deserved. Jesus took on that pain and torture as humanity's perfect substitute. Jesus didn't die just for pretty good people or people who will figure things out eventually. Jesus died for the unrighteous. For people that thumb their noses at God. For people who defy and insult their Savior. For people who sit silently while the world descends away from hope into despair. For people who adopt worldly tactics and political approaches to spiritual matters of ultimate importance. Jesus did it to bring you and every sinner to God. To take the most unworthy and bring them into God's presence holy and blameless through his own blood.

But Peter doesn't just bring this to our attention to show us how different Jesus handled unbelief and disobedience in his life. Peter wants us to see the results of what Jesus did. Jesus wasn't just some helpless victim. That was actually the plan to bring victory: "**being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.**" (1 Peter 3:18 ESV) Even though Jesus was treated unfairly and abused, he lives and reigns. We could go down a rabbit hole with the next verses. But let's just summarize that Peter says "**he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,**" to let us know Jesus rules even when it doesn't seem like he is winning. (1 Peter 3:19) That's why he brings up Noah. Some people ignore God's warnings.

They make accusations and get offended when God shows patience and calls them to repent. But in the end, God will carry out his justice. So their indifference doesn't go unnoticed. It might seem like they get away with disobedience and unbelief in this lifetime. But how they live their life doesn't change God's truth.

If Amanda knew all her efforts would win her a prize. She would know it was all worth it. If she could be secure in the knowledge that she had done a great job preparing her project, it could help take away some of the nerves. If could know during the judging that her Axolotl presentation would be recognized for its superior quality, it would help her to relax when she sees everyone's reactions.

### **3) Your baptismal identity sets Christ as Lord in your heart**

That what Peter does by summarizing the work of Jesus for you. Christ suffered for all sins. Jesus defeated disbelief and disobedience. Now Jesus brings you confidence in what he has done for you. Peter says: **"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."** (1 Peter 3:21) Your baptism connects you to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism isn't just a sign or symbol. Baptism is God's appointed means to connect you to Christ. God gives you the assurance of a clear conscience because every sin has been forgiven. By baptismal grace you stand in a right relationship with God.

Your baptismal identity simply gives you the confidence to do what Peter says God's people do all the time. You can live out your baptismal purity washed and cleansed in Christ. Peter assumes that your **"good behavior in Christ"** will get attention. (1 Peter 3:16) In a good way. People who don't yet know Christ will be curious and inquisitive. Then you don't have to make a clever sales pitch. You don't have to put the burden on yourself to accomplish their conversion. You can just let that hope you have in Christ speak for itself. Hope in our world makes quite an impression. You can speak the truth. You can do it in love. You can **"make a defense...for the hope that is in you"** while doing it **"with gentleness and respect."** (1 Peter 3:15) Instead of ignoring opportunities or insulting those who oppose you, you can patiently instruct in the truths of God's Word.

Charles Spurgeon was a popular preacher in London over a 100 years ago. He is quoted as saying: "The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself." Christ Jesus is not a curiosity. Jesus isn't a pet or a project. You can dedicate your life to learning more about the Bible and developing greater confidence in what God says. You can learn more about people and the best strategies for sharing your faith with them. But ultimately defending hope is about sharing Jesus. Jesus is your hope. Because of Jesus, you have the guaranteed hope of acceptance by your God and a place at Jesus' side. Jesus is your life. He gave his life for you. His victory gives you confidence to live out your identity as a baptized child of God today. Jesus is the lion you can let loose. Amen.