

Giving a Defense

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Faith; Defense; Baptism; Suffering / 1 Peter 3:13–22

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Resurrected King of Glory. Amen.

Today was going to be a charge to the confirmands on this verse from 1 Peter:

Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary Sixth Sunday of Easter

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,

Confirmation Sunday is one of my favorite days of the year. There's celebration because of the faith given to the young people. This year we have to wait for that day to come. I can tell you that the first seven weeks or so of this, I was doing okay. Sundays were different, my weeks looked different, but now I'm getting frustrated and now I am more confused than ever of what to do. I'm grieving a bit more because I can't be with you, even though now the Supreme Court of Wisconsin says that I can. Yes, there is turning the dial to get us back together so to speak of our small services so I can feed you with the medicine of immortality in the body and of blood of Christ. Things are still different and I am grieving that.

Things are difficult. We are all struggling in various ways with Covid-19. Maybe you have even known someone to suffer from the disease itself. As I was reading Peter here the charge is still the same. "Always be 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."

This vitally important, especially in times of suffering and tragedy. The devil would love it for you to not be ready to give your defense of the hope that is in you. Over the last 9 weeks if you are on the internet you may see so many humorous sayings and comments, we call these MEMES when they are connected with a picture. There is one that fits with this text. You see God and Satan and having a conversation. Satan tells God, "See what I can do, I closed churches across the globe, people aren't hearing the Word." God responds, "People are worshipping in their homes, Fathers have once again become faith leaders, and the gospel is being preached to many more than usual."

The devil would love none other than to take the Word of God from you. That's the devil's goal. He wants you to come into the position where the Word is silent in your ears. When the Word isn't being fed into your ears, how will you be able to give a defense to those who ask you? How are you going to be prepared?

Think of it in this way: when you were in school and you walked into the classroom for your exam or now you log-in to the computer for your exam, but then you realize you never studied or spent much time on the topic of the exam. How are you going to be successful? It's very difficult if not impossible isn't it?

So yes, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ it is vitally important to be prepared to give your defense. It is vitally important to be immersed in the Word of God. Now there are many of you who do a great job with this. There are others that need encouragement. Giving a defense is important, and typically we are called on to give a defense when we are suffering, when we are under trial - whether figuratively or literally. At some point in our lives, you will have to give a defense for the reason for the hope that is in you.

Maybe you're a college student or were at one point and you had to stand up for your faith to a professor or even a fellow classmate. Perhaps you've been on the athletic field and you've heard obscene talk and you've chosen to ask that individual or individuals to stop using that language. These are just simple ways you will be called on to give a reason for the hope that is in you.

That reason for your hope is simple: it's Jesus Christ who suffered once for your sins so that he might bring you to God. And he didn't just suffer, he died and rose again for you and your salvation. And you were brought to God dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you were brought to God through faith in the gift of Baptism.

We sang one of my favorite hymns to open our service today. I want to go back to that hymn for a few minutes and think about what Baptism does so that we can more freely give the defense. But first, hear again these words from St. Peter:

Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary Sixth Sunday of Easter

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.

The this dear Saints is what precedes in verse 20 discussing the days of Noah and the flood and how Noah and his family were saved through the flood. Baptism now saves you. This baptism isn't like washing dirt from the body. It's something far better. It's something that cleanses within and because it cleanses deep within we can sing:

“God’s own child I gladly says it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth’s treasures many? I have one worth more than any That brought me salvation free Lasting to eternity.”

Right now during these difficult days that we find ourselves in, perhaps you are finding yourself having to give a defense to why you have hope. You can go back to this basic premise...I am baptized into Christ. He gave me my salvation free. Nothing can separate me from God’s love. Neither death or disease, whether that disease is cancer or Covid.

Let’s review the second verse”Sin, disturb, my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus’ cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me Since my Baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus’ blood?”

Since you dear friends in Christ are baptized...you have a great comfort. That comfort is the cleansing sacrifice of Jesus. Baptism released you in that dear forgiving flood.

And now what we can say to Satan when he continues to come and tempt us and try to take the Word from us:

Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ! Drop your ugly accusation, I am not so soon enticed. Now that to the font I’ve traveled, All your might has come unraveled, And, against your tyranny, God, my Lord unites with me.”

Thanks be to God that He comes beside us and unites with us against the devil’s tyranny. Our Savior against the devil is our defense attorney. At the font, the cross, the grave, the empty tomb, Jesus Christ has unraveled the devil’s might. You received that gift at the font.

The defense for the reason of hope that You and I have to give rests in the comfort and the assurance that Jesus Christ was crucified and risen for you. The reason for hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that points to the promise of our own resurrection, which we sang in the last two stanzas of the opening hymn. Listen to me read them again:

“Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ! When I die, I leave all sadness To inherit paradise! Though I lie in dust and ashes Faith’s assurance brightly flashes: Baptism has the strength divine To make life immortal mine.

There is nothing worth comparing To this lifelong comfort sure! Open-eyed my grave is staring: Even there I’ll sleep secure. Though my flesh awaits its raising, Still my soul continues praising: I am baptized into Christ; I’m a child of paradise!”

Dear Saints, this is your reason for hope. Your reason for hope is the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what you are called to defend at various points in your life. This is what you are called to be prepared to defend. All of us believers, those that are baptized have this hope inside each of us, and it’s a wonderful hope.

It's a blessed hope. It's a hope that is there for you and me. It's a hope that keeps us going. It's a far better hope than hoping the baseball season starts on July 4 or that the NFL season kicks off on time or the hope that our kids go back to the school building in the fall. This hope is certain. Jesus Christ died and lives. As a believer, when you die you will live. This is the hope that is in you. This is the hope that we confess.

Thank God that we have that hope and promise. Thank God we can share it. Even in these days that are getting long, they are getting frustrating. Even in the frustrations and despair...we have hope...we have hope an everlasting hope!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.