

Life Sunday Sermon 2018

1 Peter 3:15 “Our Hope”

Rev. Everette Greene, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Cincinnati, Ohio

www.lutheransforlife.org

“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.” (1 Peter 3:15)

“Hope” is a very interesting word in the Bible. When we talk about hope today, we might say something like, “I hope it doesn’t rain.” What we mean is: “I think it might rain, but I really wish that it wouldn’t.” With this kind of hope, there is always a possibility that we might not get what we want—what we are “hoping” for. That’s not how the word “hope” is used in the Bible.

In the Bible hope is a word describing confidence. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” The hymn expresses a “confidence” in the blood and righteousness of Jesus for our salvation.

In 1 Peter 3:15, St. Peter writes, “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.”

What is this hope that is in us? God, the Father, out of His grace and love for us, gave His only Son to bridge the gap that separated us from Himself. Jesus Christ suffered and died in the place of sinners, thus satisfying the Father’s just wrath against human sin and effecting true reconciliation between God and mankind for those who believe—and then He rose from the dead. He conquered sin, death, and all the powers of Satan. By the grace extended to humanity through Christ’s death and resurrection, we can share in His victory over the grave. This is our hope, our confidence! Through Jesus Christ, we can come before our heavenly Father clothed in Christ’s righteousness.

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St. Peter’s first epistle was written to believers who were facing persecution. As such, Peter’s call to “always [be] prepared to make a defense” meant that believers had to be ready to answer objections to Christianity. When the Christians in Peter’s time were charged by the Roman state with atheism and ordered to recant their faith, they had to be ready to defend their hope in Christ despite threats of prison and torture. Peter’s instruction in 1 Peter 3:15, then, meant that believers were to have already reflected upon the answer for their faith.

St. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:15 that we live in a “crooked and twisted generation.” We live in a culture of death, but Paul goes on to say that we “shine as lights in the world.” We have a hope that is in us! In a culture where death is preferred over life, in a culture where death is considered a friend, we have a hope that is in us, which is full of life! We have life in Jesus Christ, the Lord of life!

That is our identity. We identify with the Living One, the One who once was dead but now is alive forevermore! In the culture of death, there is no hope. There is no hope for those who have no identity in God. Without knowing the Lord of hope, there is no identity as parents, as spouses. Without God, a fetus has no identity; therefore, it is easy to opt for abortion if the baby is not wanted. Without God, the elderly have no identity; therefore, when they feel like they are not productive anymore, it is easy to opt for assisted suicide.

Our identity as children of God gives us life and hope. Where does our hope and life come from? The study of God’s Word! You have been prepared through your memorization of the catechism to know what you believe. But you need to stay ready. That means you shouldn’t let your catechism or Bible gather dust on your shelf.

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It also means that you should take advantage of what God regularly provides to prepare yourself for opportunities to give an account for the hope that is in you. You come to worship on Sundays to be reminded of God's great love for you in Christ Jesus. You attend Bible study at church to learn more about God and His love for you.

In all these ways, God is preparing you to make a defense of the hope, the confidence, you have in your Savior. Not that Jesus needs defending. He doesn't! He didn't even defend Himself before the chief priest, or before Pilate, or before Herod. He willingly took His sentence of death on the cross. Yet, God has given to you the blessed opportunity to defend your hope. You have the privilege and honor to make the case for salvation through Christ's death and resurrection to anyone who comes to you and asks you why you believe what you do. And from time to time, people will ask.

God provides plenty of these opportunities already in your daily life. That neighbor next door who seems to be depressed needs your witness of the Gospel. He needs to know that Jesus is the answer to his troubles. That young lady you know who seems to be looking for love in all the wrong places, she needs to know that in Jesus she will find all the love and fulfillment she needs.

And your witness will be a credible one. Why? Because you live your life as a Christian in such a manner that others will see God and His love shining through, and this will bring them to ask about your hope.

But remember, the only way you can be ready to give an account for the hope that is in you is through the study of God's Word. The Word of God will empower you to live as God's

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child and to be a powerful witness of the Christian faith that will encourage and inspire those around you to want what you have.

Invite your friends and neighbors to church so that they will get to hear the sweetest words they will ever hear this side of heaven—words that we sometimes might take for granted.

They will hear their heavenly Father say to them through His called and ordained servant: “I forgive you all your sins! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!”

Amen!