

*Sixth Sunday of Easter*  
May 29, 2011  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

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

Are you prepared? No matter who we are, or what stage we are at in our lives, or what we do, preparation is important. The student doesn't want to go into the last week of final exams unprepared. The test results will probably not be so pretty. Neither do we want to walk into a job interview, sales pitch, or into the office of our boss without being prepared. I doubt it will go well. We probably all have had teachers where we could tell a big difference in the ones who were prepared compared to the ones who were not. The same goes for emergencies, doesn't it? It is good to be prepared. With all the storms popping up lately we might want to be prepared about where to go when the next tornado warning siren sounds. In every aspect of life or profession being prepared is extremely important!

Dear friends in Christ, if this is true when it comes to our physical and earthly life, how much more is this true when it comes to our spiritual life. Are you prepared? To be prepared spiritually is not just extremely important, it is the most important thing of all! This morning may we see why as Christians we can be, should be, and really are: **Always Prepared!**

So far in this letter the apostle Peter has done a good job of reminding us why we are prepared. We have a living hope - given to us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. We have a heavenly inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade. We have been called out of darkness into Christ's wonderful light. We are God's chosen people who walk in His grace and mercy. We are like stones securely placed upon Jesus our cornerstone.

Now Peter gives us the key to the verses of our section - the key to being prepared to live our lives on earth as God's children and Christian people. ***"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."*** Fix your hearts and minds on Christ. Jesus is the source of your strength and help. Jesus is Lord - the Lord of your life. He is your Savior and your Master. Setting apart Christ as Lord is to give your Savior first place in your life. Jesus

fills our hearts with the joy of His love and forgiveness. He fills our hearts with faith and love. Jesus' Word of salvation gives us hearts that are genuine, hearts that are filled with a living hope. As we live with hearts that set apart Christ as Lord other people will take notice. Our life in Christ is not something we will be able to hide. So we need to be prepared - always.

Prepared for what you might ask. ***“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*** The word that is translated *answer* is the Greek word *apologia*. From this word we get our word apology or apologetics. Literally, the word means to *“make a verbal defense.”* When might we as Christians need to make a verbal defense? There will be skeptics and doubters who want to know why you believe what you believe and do what you do. There will be divisive people who want to trap or test or trip you up in your faith. Then there will also be those who are inquisitive and have questions about why you have such hope in God and faith in Jesus.

So what are we to do when these people ask us about our hope? Peter says: always be prepared to give a verbal defense to everyone. Stand up for Jesus. Answer them. We might never walk into a city like Athens where there was an idol on every corner. We might never have a chance like Paul to stand up in the Areopagus and proclaim to a large crowd the truth about the true God and Savior who was unknown to them. But you may have an opportunity to talk about Jesus to a neighbor who is sick or battling cancer. You might be surprised to hear a co-worker at break ask you where you go to church and why? You might have to explain to the other children at school why you defend the kid who is always bullied. You may be asked why you don't steal from your employer at work, cheat on your taxes or why divorce is not an option for you. The skeptic you face might be the soccer mom on your child's team or the dad who is your kid's baseball coach. We just never know when we might be called upon to make a verbal defense, to give an answer, to confess Jesus as our Lord. So we are to always be prepared - prepared to answer.

Note also the Lord is concerned not just with what we say, but also how we say it. ***“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. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”*** God doesn't want us to go around being pushy *“know-it-all”* evangelists. He doesn't want preachy, *“holier-than-thou”* Pharisees who look down on others and are always barking out commands and giving orders. The Lord doesn't want religious phonies who others can see though from a mile away. He wants people who in their hearts set apart Christ as Lord. He wants people who truly know what it is all about - it's about Jesus. We want to tell others about Jesus with gentleness and respect. It does us no good to win the battle, so to speak, in a religious argument, but then lose the war because we have done nothing to benefit a person's soul. So we are to listen, ask questions, let them tell us their story. We are to show respect to people. Be good to people, even enemies, and look for opportunities to lift up Christ before their eyes.

Are we prepared? Are we always ready to answer? What would serve as a good excuse for not giving an answer to someone who asks for the reason of our hope? I really haven't heard any yet. Oh, I have heard excuses and used them myself, but they are not

good ones. *“I just didn’t feel like the timing was right. I don’t want to offend anyone. I really do not want to get involved. I do not know what to say. What if they asked me something in the Bible I don’t know? You can’t discuss these things with family. They are my neighbors and I have to live by them. What if I say something wrong?”* Tell me if you have heard of a good one because I believe there is no excuse for not telling others the reason we have a living hope. If we are afraid doesn’t Jesus promise to go with us? If we don’t know what to say hasn’t the Lord given us in His Word everything we need to know and study and proclaim? If we are concerned about messing things up, don’t we remember it is never our job to convert anyone to Christ? Do we at times not trust the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to work through it?

Let us call all the times we have blended in with the world and tried to cover up our hope, let us call all of our excuses what they are - sin. They are sins worthy of punishment and death. Then it is time for us to turn once again to the One who allows us to answer the question, *“Are you prepared?”* by saying *“Yes, I am always prepared.”* You are prepared because Jesus came to earth to be righteous for you. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died on the cross for you and me - the unrighteous. ***“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”*** You are prepared because Jesus has defeated the devil and even went to hell to proclaim His victory. ***“He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.”***

We are prepared because our Savior Jesus Christ has defeated death and has made us alive by His resurrection from the dead. You are always prepared because God has given you Christ’s victory and connected you to the power of His resurrection in your baptism. Did you hear and understand the comparison in these verses? Just as God saved Noah and his family by sending water to wipe out so much corruption, so God has saved us by water and His Word. That water of the flood symbolizes baptism which Peter writes ***“now saves you also!”*** Our baptisms give us the power to live a new life every day. We are always prepared to confess Jesus in word and deed for we were baptized into the Name of the one who now sits in a place of all power ruling all things for our good.

Yes, it is good and extremely important to be prepared. Thankfully, by God’s grace, we are always prepared. We are prepared to stand before God through the merits of Jesus who always gave an answer to everyone with gentleness and respect. We are always prepared to come before God with all our needs and requests and concerns, because the righteous One died for the unrighteous. Our faith in Jesus even prepares us for the end of the world - whenever it comes. We are always prepared because in our hearts we know that Christ is Lord. We know we have a living hope that can’t ever be taken away. So people of God, Christian men and women, who are always prepared - go give an answer to everyone who asks the reason for the hope you have. Amen.

