

Prayer of the Day:

Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes from you. Inspire us to think those things that are true and long for those things that are good, that we may always make our petitions according to your gracious will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia. (John 14:23 cf. NIV)

TEXT: 1 Peter 3:15-22

¹⁵ 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. – NIV84

Sermon Text:

Our school finishes up its final week of classes this coming week. I think to say that it's been a bit of an odd year would be putting it lightly. It kind of feels like we spent the whole year adjusting to one change after another. And who would have guessed that I would be able to tell you that all of the calls would not be the most disruptive part of the school year and that we would spend almost a quarter of the year figuring out how to do all of this from home. I believe our teachers, our students, and our parents deserve a heartfelt thank you for working hard and trying to make the best of a trying time. I know that, in school or outside of it, it hasn't been easy. But then that also brings me to the point of our second lesson today or at least one of the points of our second lesson today.

Peter isn't talking about our school year, through what he has to say probably applies at some points. Instead, he mentions the school of hard knocks. He talks about suffering and the good that can come from it. Yes, I said the good that can come from it. In fact, it teaches very well a truly important lesson. Peter begins by stating it plainly, *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.*

What comes next is interesting. *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.* Apparently, when something is important to us, we will talk about it. We'll even defend it. The word for "answer" here is actually a word used commonly for the defense one would give in court. Peter says Christ will mean something to us and so, we'll talk about Him in the world around us, we'll share Him with others, yes we'll defend Him in against the accusation of the world around us.

One of the ways we will do this in our world is simply getting better and better acquainted with our Bibles. It makes since that if we are in the Bible regularly then the more we know and the better prepared we are to answer the questions of the world around us when it comes to the contents of God's book. Not only so, but the more we are in God's Word the more God's promise holds true, *faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17).

Another of the ways you and I can be all the more prepared is to engage our world in the arguments it often brings up. This has commonly been called apologetics. There is a wealth of information out there in this field as Christians engage in the discussions which occur in our world in the attempt to make people think twice about some of the more common arguments held out in areas like creation vs. evolution, the truth of the Resurrection and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. While these are not scripture, they may just arm you with ways to get to God's Word into the discussions we have everyday with individuals and the questions they wrestle with when it comes to faith.

Of course in all of this is Peter's urging that we not act like bulls in the china shops of the world but that we seek to do so with gentleness and respect so that we do not become stumbling blocks for people. As we do so our actions and attitudes can speak volumes especially if people resort to slander to quiet the voice of the Gospel which comes from us.

That's something worth noting here as well. Peter reminds us that such opposition will be common place. *It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* There will be suffering for this Gospel. I know that's not a popular idea but Peter tells us better to suffer for the right reasons than for the doing evil, which is really not suffering at all but good and proper discipline. Instead, when we suffer for holding to the truth we have another promise of our God. *We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us* (Romans 5:3-5).

So I have to ask, "How is that going?" One might expect to see more of "gentleness and respect" in such a time as this but instead, it often appears that the opposite is true. Of course this is difficult. When insulted or attacked, it is easy to go into defense mode and as some of the best athletes out there have reminded us the best defense is often a good offense. So which pattern do we more regularly follow? When we immolate the world instead of the word, perhaps it also betrays another issue in life. Maybe we are not as connected to the Word of our God as we would like to believe.

Peter of course knows all of this all to well. He's the disciple that drew the sword and removed the ear of the servant of the high priest in the garden. He was the guy who so often was known for his bold and brash behavior while he all too regularly lacked the fortitude to back up his mouth with his actions. Where does he find the strength or ability to now stand up for Christ with the gentleness and respect he often lacked?

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. The answer isn't earth shattering. He looked to Jesus. There he saw his Savior. The one who died for sin. The one who was always perfectly prepared to answer the assaults of the world around Him, who could even send Satan packing when he came with his temptations and attacks. The perfect life was not lived to show us how but to do it for us. Remaining perfect even in the face of tremendous suffering He Fulfilled God's Law perfectly, dying to pay for our many sins, our failures to show Christ to our world in our words and actions. His resurrection is the perfect apologetic, the perfect proof of our salvation. His descent into hell, the announcement of victory to Satan and the souls who had followed him into the suffering of hell.

As Peter then mentions Noah and his ark, He comes to yet another comfort for our sin ravaged souls, Baptism. *In it* (Noah's ark) *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. In this water, our God cleanses us from sin as He connects us to Christ and therefore gives us clean and clear consciences as the Holy Spirit grants faith, connecting us to Jesus and everything He has done for us. Connecting us to our King who reigns in heaven for our eternal good. In it all, the sufferings of this world, the turmoil and guilt our own sin can cause, the fear of death, He remains and will always be in total control.

So brothers and sisters, I think this year has perhaps been a study in our ability and at times our inability to trust in our God. Things constantly change. This year perhaps more than others. But in the school of hard knocks we have an instructor worth listening too. We have a Savior worth giving thanks for. Once again, as He shows us His love and His guidance in all things, no matter what awaits us in the days, months or years to come Peter's advice is absolutely sound, *in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.* Amen.