

Easter 6A, 2011

Text: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Title: Be Prepared

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Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Easter is a time for baptisms. For Brooklyn, for Briella, for Caiden, and for you.

Each week St. Peter has been teaching you what your baptism means.

It means that you have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It means you have been made holy by the Word of God that stands forever, even when the grass and flowers fade.

It means you will suffer, even if you're doing good.

It means that you are a stone, a brick in the wall of God's house, built on Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

Today, being baptized means being prepared.

As a Boy Scout this is something I can identify with. Be prepared.

St. Peter says, "In your hearts regard 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."

Being baptized means being prepared. Being prepared to give a defense of Jesus Christ to anyone who asks you.

And they will ask. They will ask you questions, if you live as though you have a living hope, if you live as one who has been made holy, if you suffer without complaining, if you do any of these things that mark you as one who is baptized, being will start to ask you questions.

Sometimes they are simple questions. What do you believe about Jesus? Why do you go to church?

Sometimes they are tough questions. How can you believe in a loving God when there is so much suffering in the world? When tornadoes devastate towns and soldiers die in wars far from home?

Sometimes they are questions that give you an opening. Did you hear about that crazy preacher who thought the world would end?

Each of these questions are an opportunity for you to give a defense of Jesus Christ, to talk about the hope that you have.

Each of you may answer differently. Here is how I might respond.

When someone asks about Jesus, you've got the creed- all the important things are there. That's where I would start, or with Luther's explanation to article 2.

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has purchased and won me, a lost and condemned creature, not with gold or silver, but with holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, without any merit or worthiness in me, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

There's a lot there, and there might be follow up questions, but it's a place to start.

When someone asks the question about God and suffering, there's two ways to go.

First, you can point out that we can't expect to understand God's will or know why He lets certain things happen. If we could understand God He would no longer be God.

But that's not a very satisfying answer. So a more helpful answer might go something like this.

Yes God allows evil and suffering. That comes from us, human beings. Our sinfulness and our rebellion is what brings all this pain. Even things like illness and natural disasters can be traced back to the sin of Adam and Eve, which broke creation and make a huge mess of things.

God could fix all of that by controlling us and forcing us to do His will, but that's not His way, that's not love. He allows us to have free will and choose to do evil.

But He did provide a way out. He sent His Son to bear our sin and suffer along with us. He conquered sin and death by His own death and resurrection. In Holy Baptism we are joined to that death and resurrection and we have the promise of life in a world free from sin, from sickness, pain, war, death, tornadoes, any of those things.

Finally, when someone brings up the crazy folks talking about a rapture or a date for the end of the world, yes, acknowledge their foolishness, but don't let it stop there.

Ask your friend, "What do you believe? Do you think the world will end some day? Do you think Jesus is coming back? If Jesus comes back as judge, what will He say to you?" and then go from there.

Make the most of these opportunities to talk about Jesus. And don't talk about God in general, or some sort of higher power. Talk about Jesus and what Jesus did back then, and then make the connection to today- how does Jesus continue to speak and act here and now.

Jesus has not made you missionaries or apostles or pastors. But He has still put people in your life to talk to- friends, neighbors, family members.

You've got a harder job than any missionary. It's easier to talk to strangers, it's easier to go to a foreign country or a new city and talk to people you don't know.

It's much harder to talk to your grandkids who stopped caring about Jesus years ago, or to talk to the coworkers that you have to see each day, or the next-door neighbor that you've got to live with.

So it's important to be prepared, so that you're ready for the questions when they come. How do you get prepared? You get filled with Jesus and His words.

The reason that you are here today is not primarily for yourself. Yes, you need to receive forgiveness for yourself, but you are here for the sake of the people that you meet in the next week. You are here to be prepared, to be made ready to answer their questions.

You are here to listen to Jesus, to memorize a few Bible verses, a few lines from the creed, from the liturgy, or from the hymns, because there are people out there who need to hear them from you.

One short hour isn't nearly enough, and so we have another hour set aside for teaching, for you to ask your questions, to bring questions other folks have asked you, to learn some answers to give out.

I'm imploring you, come to Bible Class. Not for you. But for all the people in your life who would benefit from your spending an hour listening to Jesus, asking questions, and learning from the other saints in this congregation. You may think to yourself, I don't need that. I can guarantee you that there is someone in your life who does. There is someone that you know who would benefit from your spending just one more hour each week learning and growing in your faith.

And then there's your own study and meditation on God's Word, your time in prayer that prepares you for all the questions that you're going to face.

That's what it means to be baptized, to be prepared to be made ready by Jesus Christ Himself, as you hear His word preached, as you study His word together with the rest of the congregation, and as you read it on your own. It's not just about you, it's about all the other people who need to hear about Jesus.

There will of course be times when you're not prepared, when you say the wrong thing or say nothing when you should speak up. It happens to me all the time. I often lay awake at night thinking about the opportunities that I've missed or where I could have said something different.

But that's okay, you're forgiven, you're still loved, that's why you're here, to be prepared for the next time.

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