

Hope Giving Witness to Our Faith

Sermon Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

The Unanswerable Question

We are going to ask a question that we cannot answer. Still, it is the elephant in the room. Why does God allow things like pandemics to wrack the earth? Or we might ask what is His purpose for this? We simply cannot answer these questions. Paul says,

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor.” “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways.” Romans 11:33-34

God Can and Does Use These Times

We can't answer these questions, yet we can say this for sure. When things like this happen God can use them for His will and purpose. These things certainly get our attention. They remind us of just how helpless we are. They force us to consider our own mortality. When things happen like this for many people, they are forced to consider spiritual things and their own spiritual lives. We have seen this in history. We still remember 9/11. After that event church attendance went way up. I am sure some of you still remember World War II and what it was like then. We have all heard about the Great Depression and how that effected people. God can and does use these things to drive us to Him. For, in times like these there is nowhere else to flee. Sometimes He uses these things to strengthen our faith. Sometimes He uses these things to open hard, dark hearts. For when we are oh so helpless and vulnerable, we are more open to listen than we are when everything is going our way.

God Brings His Message in These Times

We can be sure of this. While God may have His reasons for allowing this pandemic, one outcome may be to bring the message of Jesus Christ to people who would not listen, did not pay attention or did not think they needed it in the past. So, we hear the words of God through Peter, *“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

God Sends Us in These Times

Peter says this in a different way in the words we heard last week.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession (this is who we are and now what are we to do) that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Now if God is going to use this pandemic to bring more people to faith in Jesus Christ, who is He going to use to get the message out? After reading these two passages, the answer to that is pretty clear. He wants to use us.



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An Ideal Time to Talk About Jesus

We probably haven't thought much about this. But have you thought that this is the ideal time, the God-given time to talk to a friend or family member about Jesus Christ? Maybe now they are willing to listen as we are in this mess. Or maybe it is time for parents to use family time to tell their kids just how important faith and hope in Jesus Christ actually is. Tell them how God has worked in their lives. The kids will love it.

Imagine the Blessings

We just don't think about these opportunities. These can be the blessings that God works in the midst of this tough time. Imagine what could happen to change someone's life, someone you love. Imagine how your kids could get stronger in their faith.

Our Baptism Gives Us All We Need

Our first response is always the same. Or let's say our first excuse is always "I don't know how!" Remember who you are. You belong to God. You were claimed by God the day you were baptized.

"Baptism...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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to Him." 1 Peter 3:21-22

Baptism makes us who we are. Baptism give us the hope we have. Baptism gives us the strength to give a defense for the hope that is in us.

Hope is Your "Content" and "Confidence"

If Jesus Christ can descend into hell and proclaim His victory over death, Satan and hell itself, then be assured He can give you the words and the strength to proclaim the hope that you have. That hope is both the content of what you say and the strength for you to say it. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and because of His victory all who believe in Him will live forever no matter what may happen in this world.



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Share Your Hope

There are millions of people that need to hear this hope right now. You are not responsible for getting the message to them all. But God may give you the opportunity, the blessing, of sharing the hope you have with those around you.

Listen again,

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ 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 3:13-15

Hope is Powerful

As the baptized people of God, filled with the hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Your hope is the very thing to talk about and the very power to say it. Amen

Hope Giving Witness to Our Faith

Bible Study Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Introduction

“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

Last week Peter put hope to work, deploying us as a “royal priesthood.” This week, hope goes global. A virus can spread death and destruction around the world in a matter of weeks. Hope is greater, more powerful and more infectious. In this study we discuss how God has chosen to attach His hope to us. We will confront our honest fears and concerns about witnessing our faith, and we will prepare ourselves to spread hope to the world.

Checking In

1. What have you read or viewed this week that made an impression on you? What specifically made it memorable?

Video

St. Paul's Lutheran (Des Peres) H.I.S. Puppeteers have produced a video puppet show to compliment this study. Youth and adults will enjoy watching it. Before you turn on the video, read aloud 1 Peter 3:15 at the top of this study. Simply go to mo.lcms.org/our-hope-for-years-to-come-week-5 to watch.

2. Talk about the boy's plan to have a “Hope Parade.” You might discuss some of the following:
 - a) What was motivation for the parade?
 - b) What could such a parade look like?
 - c) In what simple ways did the boy share his hope with his friend?
3. In what ways have you celebrated your hope recently?
 - a) How did you do that? Was it spontaneous? Was it planned?
 - b) Who did you invite to the parade?

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Preparing for the Word

Whether realized or not, there's a lot witnessing going from the very beginning of this study exercise. The stories we recall and retell are acts of witnessing. The conversations we share give witness to our values and beliefs. The skills we exercise witness to the training we have received. The behaviors we exhibit witness to the character of our family and faith. Whether intentional or not, witnessing is a daily activity. Let's be honest, when it comes to intentional witnessing of our faith, we all have some concerns.

4. What are some of your concerns, questions and fears when it comes to witnessing to the hope that is within you? *(Trust one another with this activity. Write down what you share. Avoid dismissing or explaining away what is shared. Simply identify what we are up against so that God's love and Spirit can address the issues.)*

Read: 1 Peter 3:13-22

5. What specific words and phrases speak to your fears?
6. What does it mean to give your witness with "gentleness and respect"? Recall some good and not-so-good examples and how these may speak to witnessing concerns.

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7. Who is the ultimate audience of your witness? How does this focus help address witnessing concerns?

8. Peter tells us people will “ask” us to share the hope within us. How have you seen that taken place? In what ways might we miss these opportunities or get ahead of them?

9. Verses 18-22 describe what we confess in the creeds, “He descended into Hell.” This passage can be confusing, but focus on the larger context of your witness. Jesus proclaims the message even to those who rejected God.
 - a) How does Jesus proclaiming even to those who “disobeyed” embolden your witness?
 - b) How has God attached His hope to you in baptism?
 - c) How do these verses give confidence to your witness?

Home Activity

Review: Last week’s activity explored giving offerings joyfully as one way we put our hope into action. You were to identify one discretionary expense that you would sacrifice and turn into an offering.

- What did you choose to sacrifice and what do you do with the offering?
- What joys did you witness from the experience?
- How did the experience add meaning to other offerings you give?
- How can giving financial offerings be a witness to your faith?
- How can offerings be given in a way that witnesses gentleness and respect?

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Bible Study Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Home Activity

PREP for FRANK

Peter teaches us to prepare for those occasions where we will be asked to share the hope within us. Here's a short exercise to PREP for FRANK. Each person should complete the exercise individually writing down the following. You can also help children do this exercise. After you have finished share what you prepared.

PREP are the steps of putting God's grace in your life down on paper in an organized way that your comfortable speaking. It stands for...

- **Practicing** hope (write specific reasons you have hope in Jesus)
- **Recalling** Bible promises (write 1-2 short, simple, Bible verses meaningful to you)
- **Experiencing** your story (write one personal story where you saw God's grace.)
- **Praying** for opportunities (make an appointment to pray for someone to ask you to share your hope)

	Thoughts for MY PREP
Practicing hope	
Recalling Bible promises	
Experiencing my story	
Praying for opportunities	

FRANK are the likely people God will send your way asking for hope. Everyone has FRANKs in their lives. Identify at least one in each category who may ask for hope.

	The People I Know Who May Ask for My Hope
Friends	
Relatives	
Acquaintances	
Neighbors	
Kids	



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Bible Study Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Prayer Journal

This week's prayer journal is about praying for your FRANK.

- *Take the PREP items and form them into a prayer of love and thanks for the grace God has given to you.*
- *Take the people you named as your "FRANK" and pray specifically for each person according their needs. This may be the things you know about them, but it could also be the things God needs to prepare in you so that you will listen more closely to their needs.*

Blessing

If you haven't done so already, make use of the Daily Reading and Reflections provided with this study to help you listen to the Bible more. It will help you grow deeper in your hope, a hope freed to serve.

Close by taking turns using 1 Peter 3:15 bless one another. An example of how you can modify it to be a blessing might go like this:

{Name} Jesus is your hope!
In your heart 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.

Hope Giving Witness to Our Faith

Household Activity Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Note: This activity is also included in the Week Five Bible Study.

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Missouri District
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

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Household Activity Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

	Thoughts for MY PREP
Practicing Hope	
Recalling Bible promises	
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Hope Giving Witness to Our Faith

Daily Readings & Reflections

Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Introduction

As we go through this pandemic, we are bombarded with conflicting testimony from scientists, reporters, leaders in government, health care and various industries. How do we sort through it all? The truth is that we live in times where we don't know all the answers. The pandemic has put a big spotlight on the issue, but it's always been there. We are not omniscient; only God is.

There's a great tendency to fill in unknowns with our own answers and theories. The result is the erosion of trust and a culture where everyone has their own "truth." This social reality impacts our initiative to give witness to our faith. Most of us concede we ought to be witnesses to the life-saving, good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. We just don't believe our testimony will be convincing or received very well. So, we just don't talk about it.

The scriptures this week enter controversial territory. There are many theologians who will tickle your curiosities with interpretations offered on Christ's descent into Hell and preaching to dead people (1 Peter 3:18-22 and 4:1-6). Lutheran teachers have long emphasized interpreting scripture on the basis on clear passages when you come to unclear passages. Thus, where mysteries remain, be humble and avoiding filling in the blanks with speculation.

From clear passages, we know the real controversial territory is our Christian witness. Peter pushes on a sore subject. He calls us to be prepared to be witnesses of the hope within us. He says Hope has power. He sees us as God's supply chain distributing hope to the world. He doesn't expect us to know everything. We don't all need to be seminary graduates. None of us will ever know all the riches of the Gospel or its application to the peculiar concerns of every person in the world. Peter actually shows us the best witness is someone who is "doing good." How we behave as forgiven and risen followers of Christ doesn't change our place in heaven. But, our behavior does impact our effectiveness as witnesses to others. Each of us has an abundance of gifts and personal experiences with grace for God's Spirit to bring hope to the world.

Set aside at least five minutes for these daily exercises and you will end up using them to be more confident and faithful witness to the hope within you. You can do this alone or in a family group. Take the grace you find and give it away!

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Daily Readings & Reflections

Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Monday

Read: *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.* 1 Peter 3:13-16

Reflect: What is the reason for the hope that is in you? Take time to write down specific reasons you have. Among the things you might consider are Bible verses, the story of Jesus, memories from Christian mentors, insights from your story with God.

Tuesday

Read: *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* 1 Peter 3:17

Reflect: The context of this verse is about settings when we speak of our hope and do good in the name of Christ. How are you tempted to do evil in denying Christ? What fears do you have in honoring Christ by speaking of Him and doing good in His name?

Wednesday

Read: *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.* 1 Peter 3:18-22

Reflect: We speak of it in the creeds, "He descended into Hell." This passage has many interpretations but focus on the larger context of your witness. Jesus proclaims the message even to those who rejected God's call. What is the verse proclaiming about your Baptism? How does this embolden your witness as a follower of Jesus?



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Daily Readings & Reflections

Week 5 1 Peter 3:13-22

Thursday

Read: *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.* 1 Peter 4:1-6

Reflect: Like yesterday there are difficult issues with various interpretations. Focus on this clear teaching: you were raised with Christ in Baptism to live a new life (c.f. 1 Peter 1:3 and Romans 6:4). How are you suffering from repetitive and addictive sins? What thoughts sabotage the power of God to free you? How do you “arm” yourself with the will of God? How does the Gospel “preach” to your struggle?

Friday

Read: *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.* 1 Peter 4:7-9

Reflect: How has the pandemic impacted your prayer life? How is the Spirit teaching you and challenging you to exercise love that covers sins and shows hospitality without grumbling?

Saturday

Read: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* 1 Peter 4:10-11

Reflect: Take an inventory of the many gifts you have received from God. Make a list. What is the purpose of every gift from God? How are exercising each gift as God’s steward (manager) of grace? What adjustments will you make to increase your offering of glory to God?

