

## 1 Peter 3:15-22

Teachers will tell you that it's very **interesting** to see how different students in their classrooms **react** when they're asked to answer a **question**. **Some** students will **immediately** raise their hand, no matter **what** the question might be. Whether they know the answer or **not**, they're willing to be **heard**. **Other** students definitely **know** the answer, but will only raise their hand if no one **else** does - if for no other reason than to end the awkward **silence**. And of course, there are **also** students who are **never** going to raise their hand, because they would be totally **embarrassed** if they gave the **wrong** answer. Maybe you remember which of those categories **you** fell into when **you** were in school. Then again, maybe you'd rather **forget**.

Today we're going to be taking a look at how we give **answers** - not in the **classroom** - but in **real life**. Throughout our lives, God brings us opportunities to answer questions about our **faith**, and interestingly enough, when it comes to speaking about our **faith**, we can have some of the same reactions **students** have in a classroom - including **fear**. However, as we look at God's Word in 1 Peter today, we'll see that when it comes to speaking about our **faith**, there is **No Need To Be Afraid**.

The apostle Peter wrote this letter to a group of Christians who were undergoing **persecution**. These were very **frightening** times for them. We're not talking about the "getting **laughed at**" kind of persecution, but rather the "your **life** is in danger if you profess **Christ**" kind of persecution. You can imagine that this kind of persecution gave many Christians at least a **little** bit of anxiety when it came to the matter of standing up for their faith. How could they know that their witnessing wouldn't result in their **imprisonment**, or possibly even in their **death**? And yet, in **spite** of this persecution, the apostle Peter encouraged those Christians to **speak up** for their faith. He doesn't give them a **pass** and tell them it's ok to be **quiet** in this particular situation. Instead, our reading begins with this **command**, "*But regard the Lord, the **Christ**, as **holy** in your hearts. Always be prepared to **give an answer** to everyone who asks you to give a **reason** for the **hope** that is in you.*"

It was **important** for those Christians to be **up front** and **honest** about the **God** they worshiped. It was important for them to let others **know** that the reason they possessed **hope** was because of their **Lord** and **Savior** Jesus Christ. Not only was it important for them to give the **reason** for the hope that they had, but it was important for them to do it in a **loving** manner. Peter goes on to write: "*But speak*

*with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience.*” **What** they said was **important** - but **how** they said it was **just** as important. They were **not** to be “in-your-face” or **condescending**, but rather, they were to speak with **gentleness and respect**, out of Christian **humility**.

We are living in a different **time** and **culture** from the Christians who first read this letter. By God’s grace, we are not **yet** facing the same kind of **persecution** in our country as those **early** Christians faced. But that **doesn’t** mean that we are no longer called on to be **witnesses** for our God. We still live in a world where many people **don’t** possess the hope of eternal life through Jesus, and as time goes on, their number seems to be **growing**. Some of those people are going to ask **us** about the **hope** we have, and we probably don’t have to think too **hard** to come up with a time when we’ve been given the opportunity to give an **answer** for our faith. It **might** have something to do with why we bother to go to **church**, or what that **Bible study** thing is all about. But in our world today, it’s much more **likely** that it’s going to be someone wondering why we are so much at **peace** when the whole world seems to be **disintegrating** all around us, and it looks like nothing is ever going to be **normal** again. Sound familiar?

How do we **react** in a situation like that? For many people a natural reaction is **fear**. Talking about our **God**, our **faith**, and **spiritual** matters in general can be an **uncomfortable** topic, because first of all, we don’t know how the other person is going to **react** to what we say. They might **disagree** with us, or they might **mock** us for our beliefs, so it’s easy for us to be filled with **fear**, and to end up saying very **little**, if we even bother to say **anything** at all. But, there’s **also** the temptation to err on the **other** end of the spectrum. Instead of being **silent** because we’re **afraid**, we might start **ranting** and **raving** about how **foolish** or **stupid** this whole corona virus thing is. The **Almighty God** is in control - just put your trust in **Him**. We’d be telling them what we **believe** - we’d be giving them an **answer** - but it would be in a very **unloving** way - a way that lacks the kind of **gentleness and respect** that God **wants** from us. Either way - staying **silent** or speaking **rudely** - is not a **God-pleasing** way of handling those situations where we are called on to be **His witnesses**.

Let’s take a little close look at that **first** kind of reaction - staying **silent** because of **fear** - because that seems to be the more **prevalent** of the two. In light of what God says in the remaining verses of our text, we need to realize that there is **No Need To Be Afraid**. Peter lists at least three reasons **not** to be **afraid** when we talk about our Savior. The **first** reason is the fact that nothing really **bad** can **happen** to us. Think about it. What’s the **worst** thing that could happen if we start

talking about our **God**, and His **love** for us, and the **forgiveness** that He brings us through His Son, **Jesus**? Someone could make **fun** of us. Someone could **upset** us. And if we really want to think about it **pessimistically** I suppose someone could pull out a **gun** and **shoot** us for our beliefs. But, think about **this**. According to the **Lord**, **none** of these things are **bad**. Yep, you heard that **right**. And right about now you're probably thinking, "Pastor has totally **lost it**. The corona virus has finally driven him off the **deep end**." But in **fact**, God tells us that it's **good** to **suffer** for the sake of the **Gospel**. Peter makes that point again and again in this first letter. In our text he writes, "*Indeed, it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing **good** than for doing **evil**,*" There **is** a suffering which **deserves** our fear - the suffering which our **sins** have earned - the suffering of **eternal** punishment in **hell**. But, thanks to **Jesus**, we will **never** have to fear that kind of suffering, because as the apostle writes, "*Christ suffered **once** for sins **in our place**, the **righteous** for the **unrighteous**, to bring you to **God**.*" Jesus took care of our greatest **enemy**, and in doing so He removed our greatest **fear**. Jesus **died** for our sins. He won our eternal **salvation** for **us**, and for **all** people. **Suffering** for the sake of that message, isn't something to **fear** - it's a **privilege** and an **honor**.

The **second** reason **We Don't Need To Be Afraid** to talk about our faith, is our **status** as baptized children of God. It's interesting to see how the Holy Spirit guides the apostle Peter on a bit of a **tangent** in verses 18-22 of our reading. He begins where we left off - with the thought that Jesus died for sins **once** for **all**. As he **elaborates** on that thought he writes, "*He was put to death in **flesh** but was made alive in **spirit**.*" Jesus **suffered** and **died** in His fleshly state of **humiliation**. He then **rose** from the dead **glorified**, in His state of **exaltation**. The apostle then moves from Jesus' glorious **resurrection** to His glorious descent into **hell**, where He proclaimed His **victory**. He writes, "*In which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in **prison**. These spirits **disobeyed** long ago, when God's patience was **waiting** in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.*" Jesus proclaimed His **victory** over death to the souls of **unbelievers** who were suffering in **hell**. And **included** among those were the souls of the unbelievers who lived at the time of the great **flood**.

Having said this, the Spirit inspired Peter to segue from the subject of the **flood** to the subject of **baptism**. He writes: "*In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were **saved** by **water**.*" Most of the time, we think of **flood**waters as waters of **destruction**; but Peter points out the fact that these waters also **saved** Noah and his family, as they lifted up Noah's **ark**. We can't really mention water that **saves** without thinking about the water of **baptism**. So Peter continues, "*And **corresponding** to that, **baptism** now saves you - not the removal of **dirt** from the*

*body but the guarantee of a **good conscience** before God through the **resurrection of Jesus Christ.***” As the waters of the **flood** saved Noah and his family, the waters of **baptism** save **us**. By the way, this connection is the reason that many baptismal fonts, including ours here at Trinity, have **eight sides** - to remind us of the **eight people** who were saved in waters of that world-wide flood. Our **baptism** makes us **confident** that the victory over death which Jesus **won** on the cross, and then **proclaimed** on Easter Sunday, becomes **our** victory. The comfort and assurance that we are God’s **children**, and that His Spirit **lives** in us through our baptism, chases away our **fears** of talking to others about our Savior.

And the **final** reason **We Don’t Need To Be Afraid** is the reminder of what we will be celebrating **next** Sunday - Jesus’ **ascension** into heaven. Peter writes, *“He went to **heaven** and is at the **right hand** of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made **subject** to him.”* When we realize that our Lord Jesus is seated in **heaven** in the position of **power** and **authority** at God’s right hand, and when we consider that He is on **our side**, **We Have No Need To Be Afraid**. After all, with the **almighty ruler** of heaven and earth in our corner - how can **anyone** or **anything** possibly cause us **harm**?

So, the next time we’re called on to share with others what we **believe** about our **God**, may we keep these truths in our hearts. We **know** that nothing **bad** can **happen** to us, because Jesus has already removed our greatest **enemy**, and our greatest **fear**. We **know** that we are **baptized children** of God, and that His Holy Spirit lives in us. And finally, we **know** that Jesus is in control of **all** things, and that He will cause them to work for our **good**. With that kind of confidence, we will **always** be able to give a **gentle** and **respectful** answer for the **hope** that we have - in **this** life as well as in the life **to come**. There is **No Need To Be Afraid**. Amen.