



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Sixth Sunday of Easter (A) – 1 Peter 3:13-22

Focus: *Hope in Christ*

word of life

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15b-16 NRSV)

Read 1 Peter 3:13-22

There is a certain irony in the question posed at the beginning of this passage: “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” (1 Peter 3:13 NRSV) There are a lot of people who harm those who do good. In fact, the people who received this original letter lived under the threat of persecution. Their lives were in danger because of their intent to do good in the name of Jesus. Disciples of Jesus Christ follow a man who did good in his life, but still died on a cross. Who will harm a person for doing good? Again, there are plenty who would do so.

1. *Who harms those who do good?*
2. *Does this opening question make you want to read more of the passage? Or do you think this author is irrelevant? Explain your answer.*

In actuality, the author reminds the reader that it doesn't matter if there are people in the world who harm those who do good. This is not about others and their intent to harm. Following Christ is about staying strong in faith despite times of trial, tribulation, and challenge. It's about being a witness to Christ even when there is difficulty. That is the witness which will cause others to take note.

Anyone can do good and be pleasant when times are easy. But this passage addresses the response when there is undue suffering. Blessing comes in suffering. These words echo the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

3. *How might someone experience being blessed during times of suffering?*
4. *How might suffering bring us closer to Christ?*

Christians need not be surprised, nor fearful, nor intimidated when there is persecution or suffering. Instead embrace *hope*. This too shall pass. *Hope* in the midst of difficulty is like the rainbow shining after a storm or the spring flower which blossoms despite the snow. Living with *hope* during difficulty is a magnet for those who search for meaning in their life.

Thus, the Christian is to be prepared to articulate *hope*. “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the *hope* that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15b NRSV)

5. *Why should a Christian be always ready to defend the “hope” that is within?*

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18 NRSV) Christ suffered on our behalf to restore an estranged relationship between humanity and God. Thus we have *hope* not because of a false view of our ability to handle situations of suffering, but because we trust in God. It is God alone who acted on our behalf through Jesus Christ. Baptism is a tangible action of God's claim on us.

6. *How does baptism enhance the hope within?*

Word among us

She was in the nursing home for twelve long years as her body's skeleton curled up. Her continual pain was heart-wrenching. And yet, when the pastor came to give her the Sacrament of Holy Communion, she never complained about her pain. Instead a pleasant, gentle smile came on her face. She was not on her journey alone, but her faith in Jesus Christ gave her a constant companion.

All those who encountered her were amazed and left inspired. Church members, family, medical teams, and nursing home staff wanted to know about her *hope* which overflowed from her small frail body. When asked about her *hope*, she would smile and reply, "Jesus is good." That summed it up for her.

We don't know how we will respond to suffering until it happens. Perhaps we can lean on the witness of others who have kept their faith despite times of suffering. Hopefully, we will find a deep reservoir of grace and gentleness which comes from our faith.

1. *In your life who has been a witness of faith during suffering?*
2. *What have you learned about yourselves during times of suffering?*
3. *What have you learned about God during difficulties?*

It can be said *hope* is both irresistible as well as irritating. For those who enjoy watching someone be crushed, then *hope* can get under the skin and be annoying. *Hope* can baffle, confuse, and anger opponents and non-believers. But for those who face daily challenges, *hope* is irresistible. People will want to know more information. "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15b-16 NRSV)

4. *Explain the hope that is in you.*
5. *Why is it important to speak of Christ with gentleness and reverence?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

It is in baptism Jesus claims us and marks us with the cross. The water placed upon us is not to clean us from dirt, but instead to give us a new life in Christ. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit forever. That allows us to dare to be hopeful, for we know Jesus paid an extreme price to bring us closer to God.

Hope springs from our faith in Christ. We can endure difficulties by the grace of God. A byproduct of this response might be the opportunity to speak about the root of *hope*.

6. *Imagine conversations with three people: a young child, a person of no faith in Christ, and someone near death. Defend the hope you have within you.*
7. *How do your words about your faith change depending on your audience?*

Prayer

Gracious God, in times of suffering, draw us near to Christ. Fill us with a spirit of gentleness and instill deep within us a *hope* from you alone. And always, give us wisdom to articulate and defend the hope within us. Amen

last word

Allow *hope* to be visible in your life.