

Theme: **Hope for Life**

Text: 1 Peter 3:15 – 17

Date: January 21, 2018

Season: Life Sunday 2018, 3rd Sun after Epiphany

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

*Grace and peace to you as you share the Hope for Life given to you, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

“Hope” is a very interesting word in the Bible. When we talk about hope today, we might say something like, “I hope it doesn’t snow too much.” What we mean is: “I think it will snow, but I really wish that we wouldn’t get a lot of snow.” With this kind of hope, there is always a possibility that we might not get what we want—what we are “hoping” for. That’s not how the word “hope” is used in the Bible.

In the Bible hope is a word describing confidence, something that we are certain it will happen. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” The hymn expresses a “confidence” in the blood and righteousness of Jesus for our salvation and eternal life.

In 1 Peter 3:15-16, the Apostle Peter writes, **“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; 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.”**

What is this hope that is in us? God, the Father, out of His grace and love for us, gave His Only Son to bridge the gap that separated us from Himself, our sins have been taken away and we have been given Christ’s righteousness. Jesus Christ suffered and died in the place of us sinners, thus satisfying the Father’s just wrath against human sin and effecting true reconciliation between God and mankind for those who believe—and then He rose from the dead to give us the guarantee that in our resurrection we will be able to live with Him in our heavenly home. He conquered sin, death, and all the powers of Satan for us. By God’s grace extended to humanity through Christ’s death and resurrection, we can share in His victory over the grave and live eternally with Him. This is our hope, our confidence! Through Jesus Christ, we can come before our heavenly Father clothed in Christ’s righteousness and know that He will welcome us with open arms of love.

The Apostle Peter's first epistle was written to believers who were facing persecution. As such, the Apostle Peter tells them to "**always be prepared to make a defense**" meaning that the believers needed to be ready to answer objections to Christianity. When the Christians in the Apostle Peter's time were charged by the Roman state with atheism and ordered to recant their faith, they had to be ready to defend their hope in Christ despite threats of prison, torture and death. The Apostle Peter's instruction in 1 Peter 3:15, meant that believers were to have already reflected upon the answer for their faith.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2:15 that we live in a "**crooked and twisted generation.**" We live in a culture of death, but the Apostle Paul goes on to say that we "**shine as lights in the world.**" We have a hope that is in us! In a culture where death is preferred over life, in a culture where death is considered a friend, we have a hope that is in us, which is full of life! We have life in Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, the giver of life!

That's our identity. We identify with the Living One, the One who once was dead but now is alive forevermore! In the culture of death, there is no hope. There is no hope for those who have no identity in God. Without knowing the Lord of hope for life, there is no identity as parents, as spouses. Without God, a fetus has no identity; therefore, it is easy to opt for abortion if the baby is not wanted. Without God, the elderly have no identity; therefore, when they feel like they are not productive anymore; it is easy to opt for assisted suicide.

Our identity as children of God gives us hope and life. Where does our hope and life come from? It started when we were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; we were given hope for life in God's name as we were given a new life as a child of God. That hope is nurtured in our study of God's Word! Many of you have been prepared for this hope through your memorization of the catechism to know what you believe, what your hope for life is. But you need to stay ready for those times when others, without hope, will ask about your hope for life. That means you shouldn't let your catechism or Bible gather dust on your shelf, but use it daily to be ready.

It also means that you should take advantage of what God regularly provides to prepare yourself for opportunities to give an account for the hope that is in you. You come to worship on Sundays to be reminded of God's great love for you in Christ Jesus. You

attend Bible study at church to learn more about God and His love for you. You listen to or read your daily devotions in God's Word, the living water of life.

In all these ways, God is preparing you to make a defense of the hope for life, the confidence you have in your Savior. Not that Jesus needs defending. He doesn't! He didn't even defend Himself before the chief priest, before Pilate, or before Herod. He willingly took His sentence of death on the cross. Yet, God has given to you the blessed opportunity to defend your hope for life. You have the privilege and honor to make the case for salvation through Christ's death and resurrection to anyone who comes to you and asks you why you believe what you do. And from time to time, people will ask and they will listen to your defense of the hope for life that you give and the Holy Spirit will change their lives forever.

God provides plenty of these opportunities already in your daily life. That neighbor next door who seems to be depressed, needs your witness of the Gospel, even if it just in concern for them. They need to know that Jesus is the answer to their troubles. That young lady you know who seems to be looking for love in all the wrong places, she needs to know that in Jesus she will find all the love and fulfillment she needs. That young man that is look for more excitement in life, he needs to know that the true fulfillment of life is found in Christ. And your witness will be a credible one. Why? Because you live your life as a Christian in such a manner that others will see God and His love shining through your life and this will bring them to ask about your hope for life.

But remember, the only way you can be ready to give an account for the hope for life that is in you is through the study of God's Word, is through you understanding of what God has given to you in your baptism, is through the strengthening of your faith as you receive the very body and blood of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Word of God will empower you to live as God's child and to be a powerful witness of the Christian faith that will encourage and inspire those around you to want what you have. The knowledge of the faith given to you in your baptism will help keep you on the path to your heavenly home, which will be a guide for others. The strengthening of your faith receive in Holy Communion will give you the ability to be God's helper to others.

Yes, invite your friends and neighbors to church so that they will get to hear the sweetest words they will ever hear this side of heaven—Words that we sometimes might

take for granted. They will hear their heavenly Father say to them through His called and ordained servant: **“I forgive you of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!”** That’s all that God is asking you to do. Share the hope for life given to you so that others may be able to share life with you and not the death their sins are taking them to. Amen!