

1 Peter 3:15-22

¹⁵But 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. ¹⁶But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you as evildoers.

¹⁷Indeed, it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, ¹⁸because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, ¹⁹in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. ²⁰These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God's patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. ²¹And 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. ²²He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Prepared

I.

What a workout! You finally finished what you started. Panting from the dehydration that comes with exertion, you grab your water bottle. From head to toe it seems as if you can feel every muscle in your body. Every one of them aches. Sweat pours down in rivulets from your hair down your forehead, stinging your eyes. Looking in the mirror you realize that every one of those rivers of sweat carved a canyon through the dirt on your face.

Grabbing soap and shampoo and a towel, you head for the shower. Nothing feels better than to let the water stream over your body and wash the dirt away. It feels so good to get cleaned up after a workout, no matter what the source of the aching muscles and the grime covering your body. Washing away the grime leaves you feeling prepared to get on with the rest of your day.

II.

What about the dirt and grime that no shower will wash away? Jesus said: "From within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean" (Mark 7:21-23, EHV).

Lather, rinse, repeat. That's all you have to do when washing the grime off your body after working out, but that kind of dirt is just skin deep. It's not so simple to get rid of the grime of sin. No soap can cut through the dirt; no amount of flowing water can rinse it away. It's deep. Sin is not just on the surface; it *lives* inside you. It permeates. It is a part of you.

Today is Confirmation Day. Our confirmands spent two years studying the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. I know...the last few weeks they were not in class with me, but they had completed all the necessary lessons and were already in the review part of our two-year course when stay-at-home affected the school year.

The Ten Commandments feature prominently in Catechism studies. One of the things the Commandments show us is how much each human being has failed to live up to what God wants from us. He expects perfection. With each Commandment, careful study leads us to an inevitable conclusion: that we have failed. The Psalmist tells us "Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5, EHV). We

are dirty. We are born that way.

Whether or not a person has done anything that would run afoul of the law or lead to imprisonment, in every single Commandment we have failed to live as God wants us to live—flawlessly. Even if there is a Commandment you *think* you have managed to keep—which really means you are looking at it too superficially, too shallowly—the Bible reminds us: “Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10, EHV).

Where is the shower that can take care of *this* problem? How can you be prepared to go about the rest of your day? No simple soap and water could ever wash the stain and dirt of sin away.

III.

But there *is* something that works, isn't there? There is a water that washes all the stain and guilt of sin away. It seems so simple; but it is so profound. For you confirmands that washing happened more than a decade ago already. It happened at the Font—the Baptismal Font.

The pastor poured water over your head. It seems so simple. There is no lather, rinse, repeat; just a few drops of water, really.

Martin Luther asked the question well in the recitations you learned: “*How can water do such great things?*” The answer? “It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit.”

Peter says the same thing in our text: “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” (1 Peter 3:21, EHV). It is not the water in and of itself, but God's promise. God promises that in Baptism he sends the Holy Spirit to work faith in your heart.

What does faith believe?

The Ten Commandments you learned about showed you your shortcomings. Never have you been able to live up to the perfection that God requires. Even Old Testament people were to learn this from the Ten Commandments. God set up the system of sacrifices to remind the people how hopeless it was to try to live up to God's requirements. When they did something wrong, a sacrifice had to be made. Every day—morning and evening—sacrifices were offered on the altar for the general sins of the people. It was an impossible task, living up to God's requirements. Every single human being has to admit we are unrighteous—undeserving of God and his love.

Peter tells us. “Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18, EHV). With Jesus, the need for endless sacrifices came to an end. Really, the sacrifices never accomplished anything but to teach people to look ahead for the One sacrifice that would matter.

Jesus was the One individual who *did* live up to God's demands. He did not sin...ever. He lived as the righteous One. At his trial he was convicted, though innocent. Jesus then carried with him every sin of every single human being with him to the cross. He suffered once for those sins. The righteous suffered for the unrighteous.

“He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit” (1 Peter 3:18, EHV). In one simple phrase Peter speaks of Jesus' humiliation and exaltation. His body was put to

death—his humiliation. He was exalted again as he was made alive in spirit.

Peter says: “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. ²²He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.” (1 Peter 3:21-22, EHV).

What does faith believe? Faith looks to Jesus’ resurrection as the proof that God accepted his payment on our behalf. Our further comfort is that he sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father with everything—every power and authority—subject to him.

IV.

Baptism prepared you. It prepared you for a life of faith in Christ Jesus as your Savior and Lord. It prepared you to learn and grow in your faith.

You have learned. You have grown. Now what?

“But regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15, EHV). The “but” at the beginning of that sentence is significant. It points back to the previous verse, a verse which is not part of today’s Second Lesson. “If you should happen to suffer because of righteousness, you are blessed. Do not be afraid of what they fear, and do not be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14, EHV). How can we not be afraid when we are threatened? How can we not be troubled when we might happen to suffer because of righteousness? It’s all well and good to *say* we are blessed when we suffer for being a Christian, but it isn’t very comfortable; it *does* seem to cause us fear.

The answer to fear, the way we stay untroubled, is the first part of the first verse of our text: “But regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15, EHV). *Jesus* is the source of strength to guide us through life, no matter what gets thrown our way—pandemic, pestilence, or just the ordinary trials of life.

But let’s go on with the first verse: “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” (1 Peter 3:15, EHV). This is what your confirmation is all about. You are now prepared. You are prepared to examine yourselves and receive the Lord’s Supper to strengthen and renew your faith again and again. You are prepared to live your life as a Christian.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. ¹⁶But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you as evildoers” (1 Peter 3:15-16, EHV).

When you live your life as a Christian, sometimes you will be challenged. You are now prepared. Continue your studies throughout your life to continue to *be* prepared. Be prepared to give an answer about the hope you have in Christ Jesus. Do it with gentleness and respect. A “holier-than-thou” attitude just turns people off. Arrogance isn’t going to help you give an answer to those who are asking questions about your faith.

It has really been more than two years. From the time you are baptized and begin to grow in your Christian faith, you are preparing for the moment you are confirmed in your faith and make a solemn vow to remain faithful to your Lord Jesus, even to the death. The truth is, your preparations never stop as long as you live.

You will find that the more you study on your own, the more confident you are in giving answers to others. You will find that your faith becomes even more sure. You have a hope in you—a sure hope that looks with confidence to heaven. You are prepared. Amen.