

Can You Give an Answer as to Your Faith and Hope?

1 Peter 3:15-16

I spoke with someone recently that shared that she felt unprepared when asked about her faith and hope. It bothered her to the point that she was broken hearted. I began to think on that and wonder just how many of us from CLC would be instantly ready to give our answer as to our hope, our Faith.

One of the abilities we have been given is the ability to express ourselves in a variety of ways. Usually we have learned to express our feelings consistent with what we are trying to say in some way.

For example, when we are excited about something, we usually express it as follows: (enthusiastically) "**Guess what! I have great news!**" However, what if we said it this way, in a flat monotone voice, "**Guess what! I have some news.**" We would think something is wrong, right?

There are a lot of things that get us excited - sports, a date, some accomplishment, but does our Christian faith get us excited? Does it make us shout for joy? Does it make us want to share it with others? Does it make people want to ask us what the joy and hope in our lives is all about?

This morning we are going to focus on an aspect of the Christian life and way. What it is? Let's find out. Text:

1 Peter 3:15-16 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: ¹⁶ Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

For some people, witnessing is the hardest thing to do regarding the Christian faith. What is witnessing/evangelism/sharing your faith?

In I Peter 3:15 we're instructed to always be ready give a reason for the hope that we have.

It produces more guilt and more frustration in a Christian than just about anything else.

Someone gave a definition of what I believe to be an outstanding definition of witnessing. "**It is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.**"

Notice that it involves sharing, communication. Sharing the gospel, the good

news of Jesus. Not the good news about the church; or some program the church has going on; or about the preacher or choir or about some other leader within the church. It is sharing the good news of the Jesus Christ. And what is that good news? **It is that we can be forgiven; that we can stop looking over our shoulder and wondering if our past will ever catch up with us; that God wants to help us live in the way we were meant to live.** That's the good news we share.

But how do we share? That's where our text comes in. In verse 15-16 gives us some hints. **We do so in a gentle and respectful way with a clear conscience.**

I don't know about you but I resent a hard sale regardless of the product. I abhor those loud car sales commercials. Becky and I have made up our minds that if we ever buy another car, we won't buy one from any of those dealerships that get really loud and in our face during some commercial break. I resent someone trying to pushing me into making a decision before I am ready too. I abhor those ambulance chaser commercials too. One call, we're the good guys, we're the strong arm for you and on and on and on. But that has been the mode of evangelism for many, many years. Now it may work in some cases, but not in the majority. It turns people off and that's contrary to what Peter says in this passage to believers in other places.

Let me ask you something this morning, **"How did you come to faith?"** Maybe your back was against the wall. But not because the person who God was using at that moment in your life put you there, it was because the Holy Spirit put you there. His conviction is much more powerful than our conviction.

I did not come to faith in Christ under a high-pressure sales tactic. I came to Christ, when all at once the Holy Spirit made it clear what I needed to do and I did it in response to the gentle but clear working of the Holy Spirit. Which brings us back to the definition of witnessing that we are working with.

Witnessing turns into a sales pitch from us when we leave the Holy Spirit out of it. It happens all the time. I can remember going to a church many years ago when we traveled and sang at different churches every Sunday. At the end of the sermon the pastor starting walking up and down the aisle and getting right in people's faces and putting them on the spot.

The Holy Spirit moves in us to do the work of God when the time is right and we'll know when He does!

We struggle. We sweat. We get antsy. We get miserable.

I'll never forget when I was 13 years old, I was resisting the Holy Spirit knocking on my hearts door. I was miserable. I knew that I had to make some changes and I did not want to. I knew that the language I was beginning to use was wrong. I knew the group that I was hanging out with was starting to pull me in the wrong direction. I knew what my Sunday School teachers were telling was right and I knew the Holy Spirit was pulling on my hearts strings. No one was standing over me and shouting, "come on sinner! Get up there!"

Finally, I could not stand it anymore. I knew that I needed to confess my sins and ask Jesus for His forgiveness of those sins and ask Him to save me. I got up during the invitation time and went straight to Pastor George Doyle with tears running down my face, I asked him to lead me in asking Jesus in my heart, which he did.

I began to tell my parents, my aunts and uncles about my being saved and what that meant to me. They were all happy for me and all eventually too were saved. I was witnessing because of the excitement in my heart and couldn't stop.

St Francis of Assisi once said, "Go preach the gospel. Use words if necessary."

There is a place and time for talking about what Christ has done for us. Peter makes that clear in our passage. But, are we living it in such a manner that people are seeing a difference in our lives such that it makes people want to us ask what that is?

Which leads us to verse 15 of our text. "And **“if” you are asked about your **Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.**"**

What gets us out of bed ready for another day? Survival, duty, fear, obligation? Or is there a joy, a hope, and excitement that motivates to say, "Good morning God and thank you for this day and this life?"

What gets us up on this day ready to come here to worship, seek, and hear a good word from the Lord? Is it Duty, Routine, or a joy, an expectation, a hope that says, "Thank God who works through His spirit to make clear the condition of our hearts to each one of us!**"**

Every time we take communion together, I think about the events of that

night when Jesus was betrayed and given a death sentence. I think of Peter stumbling and denying our Lord. Jesus did not leave Peter to live the remainder of his life with the after effects of his betrayal.

No, he later, after His resurrection, reached out to him and asked, "How much do you really love me Peter? Then take care of the flock. Take care of the church, take care of the people that are coming to me."

Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit possessed Peter and he began to speak boldly and with confidence about the One who came to forgive and make us right with God so that we could live right with God and others.

Peter shared confidently, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, of the hope that was in him. A hope overshadowed his life.

And it is this Peter who wrote many years later, "And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it."

Can you explain your Christian hope? Can we, as the people of God, explain our corporate Christian hope? Can people see it in us? Can we see it in one another?

It is God's will that not only we as individuals be ready to share the hope that is within us, but also as this particular people of God as we gather together on Sundays and Wednesday and wherever else we do so.

Finally as we share of this hope that is within us, this gospel of Christ, this good news of Jesus, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we leave the results to God. Our role is to "show and tell."

We sow the seed in Word and deed but God does the rest and each of us sows differently. But we sow the same seed - the good news.

I conclude with three questions today. The first one is this, **"If you were to make one change in your life that really made people notice God at work in your life to the point they begin to ask you about God, what would that change be?"**

Number two, **"If we were to make one change in our congregational life that really made people notice God at work here to the point they starting coming and seeking God, what change would that be?"**

Question number three, "Are we ready and willing to make that change with God's help?"