

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
April 27, 2008

Our “Apology” of Jesus

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

In Luther's Morning Prayer, we pray the following: “I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger...” We pray that for a reason and that reason is this: as Christians, we will be harmed and there will be danger. Peter recognized that in our text. Although the followers of Jesus could not be accused of wrongdoing by the unbelieving community, their faith in Jesus of Nazareth and the kindness and love which they strove to show everyone set them apart from most other people, but also set them up for ridicule and abuse from the community. How were the Christians to act toward those who falsely accused them of doing evil? How should they react in the face of questions and objections? Ask yourself how are you, as a Christian, to act toward those who falsely accuse you of doing evil? How should you react?

Jesus tells us how we are to react: *“But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well....”* Instead of trying to get even for evil done to us, instead of plotting on how to make the person pay for evil done to us, Jesus says that we are to turn the other cheek; we are not to seek vengeance for wrongs done to us.

Peter has said that on most occasions no one will insult, threaten or harm us if we do what is good. But even if we should experience suffering for doing the good things we do in Christ, there is no reason for us to be afraid of such threats. The unstated question is: *“How can we be unafraid of those who threaten us even when we have done nothing wrong?”* The answer is clearly given by Peter: *“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.”*

Peter's answer may or may not make sense. Therefore, we must ask the good Lutheran question: What does this mean?

First and foremost, we are to *“regard Christ the Lord as holy.”* To regard Christ as Lord is to give the Savior first place in our hearts. Just as every sin of thought, word or action can be traced to the sinful desires of the heart, so the effective rule of Christ in our lives must begin with His reign in our hearts. Christ rules in the hearts of all who trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and who rely on Him for providential care and protection.

All too often, we put many things before Christ: our families, our jobs, our hobbies, our problems and many other things. If there is time left in our busy schedules or our hectic lives, then we will make that time for Jesus; however, that is not the way that it should be. Jesus is not someone that we can put on a shelf, pull Him out when we need Him, then put Him back on the shelf until the next time. Christ does not place anything above His bride, the Church. He came to give His life for the Church. He died

so that His bride, the Church, could live. He died so that **YOU** could live. Nothing in this world is greater than each and every one of God's children.

The second half of Peter's answer is just as difficult, if not more than the first half: *“always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”*

The situation in which a Christian may find himself could prove personally embarrassing, potentially threatening or even life-endangering, but he is to be ready to give an answer. He is to be ready to make an “apology,” that is, a defense of his faith.

Making an apology of the faith is nothing new to Lutherans. We even have a document in our Lutheran Confessions entitled “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession.” The princes of the German provinces gave their statement of faith to Emperor Charles V in the Augsburg Confession. When the Roman Catholic Church refused to accept that statement of faith, Philip Melancthon issued the Apology, an even greater defense of the faith which the Lutherans held. Both documents were essentially a death sentence, insofar as they were confessions which were contrary to that of the Roman Catholic Church, yet both were presented and the Lutherans refused to back down on their confession and defense of the faith.

Times have changed since 1530. A defense of the faith is not as quick to come by as it was then. We don't want to make a confession of faith because our non-Christian friends may look at us differently if we start with the “God-talk.” Our defense of the faith may not be good for our career. It may not be good for our reputation. It may not be good for any number of things. However, that doesn't mean that we are not to give a defense of the faith, especially when the opportunity presents itself to us.

We are reminded of the words which Jesus left the disciples following the resurrection: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* We have all been charged to give a witness and testimony of the faith that has been given to us. Through that witness and testimony, we make a defense of the faith.

Let me ask you a question. Is there a right way and a wrong way of making a defense of Christ? Peter says that yes, there is a right and wrong way. The right way is *“with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience.”* The reason for this is simple: the Gospel is offensive. How we speak to or about people can turn people off, even if that is not our intent. This attitude is the opposite of brashness, arrogance, hot-headedness or a “holier-than-thou” attitude. This should be obvious to the Christian. The unbelieving world can be expected to speak maliciously - to harass, insult, threaten, mistreat, abuse or revile us. Why should we use the same type of speech to them when we are bringing a message of love and forgiveness which was given to us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

The simple message which we proclaim is again given to us by Peter: *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”* In one sentence Peter summarizes the scope and effect of Christ's work. The first part of the sentence tells us what Jesus did and how effective His work was while the second part of the sentence reminds us that Jesus is the sinless Son of God who died for

sinner. Jesus is not our Savior because He gave himself as an example for us to follow so that we might save ourselves. Jesus is our Savior because He is the perfect Son of God who gave His life in our place in order that we might be brought to God. This faith and hope is not a misplaced faith or an unsure hope. Jesus is the perfect substitute who has fully completed His atoning work in our behalf and has brought us, without sin, to God. All of this was done for us through His life, death and resurrection. This gift of everlasting life is given to us in our Baptism. Baptism is more than a rite of initiation, more than a church ceremony or christening. Baptism saves you. How does Baptism save you? Baptism saves you *“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* Without Jesus’ resurrection there would be no baptism, no salvation; in fact, there would be no righteousness at all.

Challenges will indeed come in your life. As the baptized children of God, those made to be His disciples through Baptism and the teaching of God's Word, you are continually being made ready to make a confident defense of the eternal hope that is in you through the life, death, descent into hell, resurrection, and reign at the right hand of the Father of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.