

Sermon: 6th Sunday after Easter

Text: 1 Peter 3:13-22 (v.15)

Theme: Confessing our faith

Goal: To be prepared to confess our faith boldly

Dear Friends,

Introduction: If someone asks you about your faith and what you believe – what is your reaction? Are you prepared to give a right answer and to boldly confess your faith?

Peter is writing his letter to Christians suffering persecutions due to their faith. Some of them were slaves, and their owners used to threaten them if they continue to go to the Christian meetings. Peter himself had experienced several times what it meant to be on trial because of his faith in Jesus. But he had also experienced what the good promise of Christ means: “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11). The Book of Acts (4:13) reports when Peter and John were in trial before the Sanhedrin: “When they (the enemies) saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled men, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

Peter is now encouraging Christians, from then and from now, not to be shy when someone poses questions about the hope we have.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this in gentleness and respect.”

I know that sometimes it is not easy to give the right answer to questions raised about our faith and life. Some Christians don't have much knowledge about the Bible truths. Some people begin to quarrel about issues that the Bible doesn't answer just to try to confuse the Christians. Therefore it is so important to read and to study the Bible to grow in knowledge and faith. Daily devotions help, like the Meditation booklet. To take part in the Bible Study group gives the opportunity to raise questions and to get some answers for the daily challenges. All is welcome to join this group.

The first Christians elaborated a summary of the Christian faith and they memorized it not just as a confession of faith but also as an answer to the many questions raised by the non-Christians. This is the Apostles' Creed that we still confess. Besides it two other creeds were formulated by the early Christian Church as an answer to questions, critics and heresies that were threatening the first Christian Church; they are: The Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.

When Peter encourages the Christians to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have", he set a draft of the Apostles' Creed in our text. The core of the Apostles' Creed is here: Jesus and the salvation He conquered for us.

I – The suffering of Christ

Peter links the suffering of the Christians with the suffering of Christ: "For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body."

We confess in the Creed that "*Jesus Christ... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.*" This was not just a

historical event, but it had a reason: “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” The suffering and death of Jesus was not just a mistake made by Pilate nor was it due to the jealousy of the Sanhedrin. It was God’s plan to punish our sins on a substitute, on a scapegoat. Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for us all out of love, to bring us back to God. We will never understand this kind of love; but we believe it and we accept it as for us and our salvation. “Blessed are those who have believed!” (John 20:29).

II – The victory of Christ

Peter enters now in a grey area on the other side of the curtain: What happened between Jesus’ death and resurrection? We confess in the Creed: *“Jesus Christ...was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead...”* What does it mean that *“he descended into hell”*? Peter writes: “He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.” There was no doubt about the condemnation of the people at the flood. Their bodies perished in the flood, but their spirits are still in prison in hell. They are representatives of all the others condemned who didn’t repent and didn’t believe in God’s promises.

What did Jesus preach/proclaim to them? He proclaimed His victory over the big enemy and the justice of God over those who didn’t accept God’s invitation to repent and to believe. Nothing more is said about this event. It was the first act of glory after Jesus’ death on the cross. Nobody could see it; it was revealed by God to the Holy Apostles, and therefore they put it in the Creed.

And then Peter says: “It (the Baptism) saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.” We confess according to these words: *“He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.”*

III – The Baptism

Peter puts a special emphasis on the Baptism: “In it (in the flood) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The Baptism is not our decision or our act; it is God saving us through the water and the Word by the resurrection of Jesus. We preached recently about the relationship of Baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our Sunday School children will do a revision on the Baptism today at the Service as they are finishing this chapter in the SS Curriculum.

Conclusion: As baptized and saved people by the grace of God, we cannot deny our faith when we are asked about it. Even if we don’t have all the answers to the questions people address us, but we know the Apostle’s Creed by heart and it is a good source to give some answers and to witness our faith and our hope. Don’t enter in details, but be objective about your faith and hope in Christ, what He did for you as we confess in the Creed, and the forgiveness and peace He gives you by faith. And show through your behaviour what you believe. St. Francis of Assisi said: “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” Amen.