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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 21, 2017
5th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21

Hymns: 340; 360; 754; 313:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:15-22

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. ²¹There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, Our Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: An Embattled Presidency

What dominates the news these days is how President Trump makes yet another mistake. It doesn't matter if he was within his rights as president to sign a particular executive order or to hire or fire one or another individual, those who oppose the President will make the most of it, and wait for him to "tweet" about it and say something that will leave one of White House staff dangling. It is an embattled presidency. It has been from day one, and for the people that support the president it remains a continuing challenge to defend him, or his actions, or his words. Some supporters might express their wish that he would think a little more before speaking or tweeting, or consult with advisors before telling representatives of other governments what he knows, or what the United States is doing. He is certainly not a perfect president, and many of his detractors find that delightful. They find joy in putting President Trump in his place.

Why do I bring this up? Because there are definite parallels between the manner in which our President is being put in his place by his detractors and the way Jesus' detractors seek to put Jesus in His place. Many mock the Lord, and those who they regard as intellectually challenged enough to believe the Bible. They seek to shape Jesus into something less than He is. They would minimize the truth of His sufferings and death, and undermine what they regard as the myth of Jesus' resurrection. All this has been going on since before Jesus died and rose again. The world will not let up in their endeavor to put Jesus in His place until the Lord returns in glory. Then the Lord Himself will reveal what His true place is at the right hand of God the Father, and Jesus Himself shall determine where each person's place is for all eternity.

But now we are in this world during this time of grace in which we face all this from the world, this steady stream of seeking to put Jesus in His place. Peter wrote this epistle because of the trials of faith brought about by this tirade against the Lord and those who believed on Jesus. In the first chapter Peter made the point that this hope that we have in Christ is our greatest treasure, our faith being

more precious than gold that perishes. So then it is important for us, Christ believers, to be equally busy --

THEME: Putting Jesus in His Place.

And we begin with --

I. His Place as Lord in Our Hearts.

These opening few words of our text set the tone for our entire text because they are so very important for our daily lives.

1 Peter 3:15_a “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.”

It is important for us to really grasp the meaning of the word “sanctify.” It is when one sets something aside for a holy purpose, when one regards something as more than precious, but holy and pure, and above reproach. That is Jesus’ place in our hearts, for when we think of the Lord God it is not only God the Father that we adore, it is God the Son as well. Jesus is Lord of our lives. Jesus is Lord of our hearts.

We know Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer. We know that He was the Son of God from all eternity, God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We know that He came down to earth and became our brother so that He could fulfill all righteousness for us. We know He took on our flesh and blood, becoming fully human, so that He could die and He did die for us! We are redeemed, “*You are not your own for you were bought at a price*” (1 Corinthians 6:20), that price was the holy precious blood of Jesus poured out in bitter anguish upon the cross.

He redeemed us to God. He bought us so that we would be freed from a cruel slavery to the devil who was our lord in our unregenerate state. Yes, the devil was the lord of our hearts and lives in our unregenerate state. Jesus redeemed us to God so that we are the Lord’s. We are His children, heirs of eternal life. We are now owned fully by the Lord God, but no longer in a cruel servitude whose end is destruction, but rather in a gracious servitude whose end is glory supernal.

Now recognize the wonder of this grace by putting Jesus in His proper place in our hearts, first place, before anybody else, before self, way before any carnal pleasure. “*Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts!*”

And then be ready to give Jesus --

II. His Place in our Conversation.

Our text exhorts us:

1 Peter 3:15-17 “always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

We need to remember that Peter is addressing Christians under pressure. Peter’s epistles were not addressed to a specific congregation with a unique set of circumstances. Peter’s epistles were “general epistles.” They were sent around as a circular to all the congregations because they all faced the same kind of pressure from the world. It didn’t matter if it they were principally Jewish believers or gentile believers, the actions directed at them from the unbelievers in the world were brash, critical, demeaning, and sometimes violent.

Nothing has changed. Peter’s words are addressed to us today who live in a world that can be and often is rude, brash, critical, demeaning, and sometimes violent towards those who are true Christ confessors. So how does the Spirit tell us to respond? Always be ready to give a defense, to give a good and proper answer regarding the hope that you have in Christ. Put Jesus in His place in your conversation. When people ask, and the Greek word is a strong word, when people demand an answer, and would put you in a corner and are verbally combative, then be ready. Don’t get tongue tied and back away. Put Christ in His place in your conversation.

And that place isn’t combative. We don’t argue Christ. We share Christ. We testify telling the truth about what Jesus is and what He has done for us. We don’t do it either in a hateful way, or a

demeaning way giving the impression that we are better than they are. Peter said with meekness and fear, and here fear doesn't mean scared, it means with respect, acknowledging the love Christ has for those with whom we are speaking. Kindness. Kindness goes a long way in bringing a message home to others. When raising a rather brash son, one of my mother's favorite passages was in Paul's epistle to the Romans. I especially remember that "heaping coals of fire" part.

Romans 12:19-21 "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

We have something wonderful to share, yes even with those who despise or mock us. Our lives should reflect the good that is Christ. Doing what is right, eschewing what is evil will show the world that they are simply wrong about us and how they might attempt to discredit us, and thereby discredit Christ. The devil finds such joy in tripping up the child of God so that we sin before the world. That gives the world its chance to pile on, mocking Jesus, and characterizing Christians as a sanctimonious hypocrites. Don't give them that. Keep your life pure. Flee the world and its corruption. Giving Jesus His place in your conversation includes putting Jesus in His proper place in your daily walk in life.

We do this by putting Jesus in --

III. His Place as Our Exalted Lord.

We ought to possess the confidence of faith that comes with possessing a victorious Savior!

Listen again to the closing verses of our text and hear the victory, and take that victory to heart. Jesus is our victorious Lord and the foundation of our hope!

1 Peter 3:18-22 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

This is rich with grace! Jesus suffered ONCE for sins. His sacrifice is the atoning sacrifice that paid the debt in full. The Just died for the unjust. He took our place under the curse of God. He died in the flesh! He died and was buried! But Jesus was victorious in death. In our confessions we say, “He descended into hell” This is the passage that tells us about that descent into hell. Don’t be confused. Jesus suffered the pangs of eternal death on the cross, but when Jesus actually descended into that abyss it was to declare His victory to the spirits that dwell in that place, and not the evil angels, but the spirits of those people who defied God before the flood. These were people who knew all about God, all about the wonder of God’s creating power, all about the promise of the Seed of the woman, and scoffed. These were the spirits of those who died in the flood.

The flood was a terrible judgment upon this world, but there is a flip side to this that Peter points out. The flood was a deliverance for Noah and his sons and their wives. The flood saved them from the evil of this world that had overcome all in those final days but those eight souls. They were saved by water. Peter uses this as a transition to how the Lord saves us by water. We are saved by the water of baptism. The fact of our baptism gives us assurance of faith, for our baptism was not like any other washing we received. It was not about washing the filth or the stink off our bodies; it was the washing of the sins off our souls, a washing that cleansed our consciences.

Our confidence of all this flows from Jesus' exaltation! We know the power of Jesus' resurrection. This coming Thursday is Ascension Day! Next Sunday that will be the focus of our worship and the cause of our singing "Alleluia". It is all about the victory and the power and the majesty that is Christ's as He sits at the right hand of God with all power and might and dominion. And there He makes intercession for us. And there we know we have our Lord looking out for us, for you and me.

You see our walk through this life in this world is all about "Putting Christ in His place!" We do that and we have nothing to fear. We do that and we can make our way through this life with confidence and joy. He has His place in our hearts, and that is the joy of our hearts and of our lives. He has place in our conversation, in our manner of life so that we glorify Christ in our lives and in our words. That gives our lives meaning and purpose, and honor and glory, for we live as children of God ready, willing, and able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to give an answer for the hope that is in us. We can give that answer because we know that God the Father has indeed put Christ in His place, at His right hand as our Risen and exalted Lord who has gotten us the victory, a victory which He himself declared in no uncertain terms, a victory He is pleased to bestow upon us so that we might have life in His name. It really is all about *Putting Jesus in His Place!*

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.