

**Goal: The hearers are prepared to give answer to everyone who asks of their hope.**

“*Semper Paratus.*” Who knows what that means? “*Semper Paratus.*” It’s the motto of the United States Coast Guard. “*Semper Paratus*” is Latin for “*Always Prepared.*” I always think of that when I read today’s epistle: “*in your hearts honor 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, yet do it with gentleness and respect.*” (1 Peter 3: 15) There is nothing complicated about those words, but the words are important for the mission of our church!

“*In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.*” Easy to say; but easier said than done. The key word is Lord. To have Jesus as your Lord means that He’s in charge of your life. But who or what is really in charge of your life? Is it your job? Investments? Your busy schedule? Your kids? Or is it some addictive behavior like Facebook? Your lord is whoever or whatever controls you.

“*In your hearts honor 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.*” The reason for the hope that we have is JESUS. He’s the reason. His death upon the cross is the reason for our hope because in Him we have forgiveness. His resurrection from the tomb is the reason for our hope because He is our guarantee of eternal life.

“*In your hearts honor 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.*” Now, why would anyone ask? No one will ever ask you about the hope that’s in you, if they don’t know you have it. Do the people in your life know about the hope you have in Christ? Do they know you’re a Christian? I’m not talking about members of Saint Mark; I’m talking about coworkers, neighbors, and schoolmates. Can they tell you’re a follower of Jesus? You don’t need to walk around with a Bible in hand or a cross around your neck. You don’t have to pretend you are happy all the time and walk around with a permanent smile. On the contrary, the hope that we have can be seen in our response to difficulty, in our attitude toward the poor and to those who are hurting. The hope that we have can be seen in the way we talk and in the way we act.

“*In your hearts honor 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, yet do it with*

***gentleness and respect.***” Have you ever been confronted by someone who thought their religion was better than yours? It’s usually not very pleasant. There is a wonderful example of giving the reason for the hope that you have with gentleness and respect in our reading from Acts. When Paul arrived in Athens, ***“he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” (Acts 17: 16)*** But he didn’t condemn them saying, ***“Stop worshipping your false gods and worthless idols or you’re going to hell.”*** Instead, he gently and respectfully said, ***“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17: 22 – 23)*** And he did.

He knew their religion was false. But in order to get them to listen, he showed respect for where they were in their beliefs and got on common ground. So also when we have the opportunity to give the reason for the hope we have in Christ, do it ***“with gentleness and respect”*** being careful to not put down or put off those we are speaking.

Today our Lord reminds us, ***“In your hearts honor 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, yet do it with gentleness and respect.”*** So be on the lookout this week for an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that you have. And be sure to live so that those around you can see the hope that you have. After all, our hope is not just for us; it is for everyone. Ours is a living hope based on the fact that ***“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” (1 Peter 3: 18)*** Sharing that news is more important than anything else in this world. Amen.

This morning we recognize and celebrate the faith and hope of one of our youth, who stands before you as a brother and fellow member of Christ’s ministry.

**Connor** – (Deuteronomy 31:6) ***“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, he is the one who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”***