

Intro

Ada and I were once at a fruit-farm shopping, and we were one of the few customers. The lady who was working there walked past and said so to herself, “I wonder why we are doing all this hard work”. She was clearly a bit tired and fed up, and probably did not intend me to hear this. However, I could not resist and said: “We do this to the glory of God.” She then looked at me and said, “hmm, for me religion is to look after each other and help each other”. I was a bit taken aback by her answer, but said, “Yes, you are right, but even that we do to bring glory to God as he loves each one of us and do not want us to mistreat each other”. She then looked at me, and then moved on. I must admit that it wasn’t the most pithy answer I could give, but I tried.

Sunday after Pentecost

Looking at the lectionary readings for today, we are reminded of the great commission: “

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Last week we celebrated that we have received the Holy Spirit within us for sanctification and upon us for empowerment, and now we are reminded why this is: To make disciples of all nations. However, you may want to ask how?

And that is where our reading from 1 Peter 3 and 4 comes in. In St Andrews we are working through the Bible studies from LICC Frontline on 1 Peter, and this chapter is headed ‘Confident in witness’. The first step we need to do in order to make disciples is to be witness of Jesus Christ.

Always be prepared

I believe that the spine of this reading, where everything else hangs of from is this saying: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you

to give the reason for the hope that you have (3:15b).” It is interesting that Peter does not say go and tell everybody about Jesus, whether they want to hear or not. He says be prepared to answer. He expects that by the way that we live and act people will want to ask us.

Up until now in 1 Peter we have learned that we can be confident:

- because of the gospel (S1),
- because of our identity in Christ (nothing can harm us – S2),
- because of our place in the world and relationships (S3, S4) even though we may not have wealth and power, and as a result we should have started to live differently.

And we live differently, because we have a hope beyond this world: Jesus Christ is our saviour. So that means that whatever goes wrong for us, with our health, with our relationships, with our finances, with the economical and/or political situation we live in, we have hope. We do not despair, we do not complain, we do not grumble, because we know that this is only temporary and at the end we will be with Jesus. But we have to live out this hope: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord (3:15a), Peter says – that is our motivation and our hope.

The Christians that Peter wrote to were in a complete different situation than us. We have heard that some of them were slaves or servants, others were married to non-Christians, and inequality in marriage was normal. So they were suffering already, and here Peter brings in another aspect why they were suffering: They were spoken of maliciously and they were slandered. Not because of who they were in society, no, but because they were Christians and followers of Christ. They had started to behave differently, they did not do “what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.” (4:3) and “They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you” (4:4). Because of the different way of life, they had become a target of slander and ridicule. And their good behaviour spoke to heart of those who were not Christians, as they felt judged by them. Therefore they responded by malicious words, abuse, slander and ridicule. And we have probably experienced the same when people realise that we are Christians.

And it is in this situation that they are questioned by the same people: and Peter tells them to be prepared to speak of the reason for the hope that they have, with gentleness and respect (3:15c).

So the question for us is twofold:

1. Can people see from the way that we live, act, behave with friends, family, neighbours, how we avoid reckless and wild living, that we are different?

Especially in this time of lock-down, illness and general sense of despair, which will probably only get worse once the national bill has to be paid for dealing with Covid-19. Will people see that we have a hope in us that is different?

2. Are we then prepared to talk about it? Are we prepared to say that it is Jesus? Are we prepared to give a testimony of who Jesus is for us, and why we have become followers of Christ? When I worked for Kimberly-Clark we were encouraged to write an elevator speech about our project and its benefits? Why? Well, they said, you might find yourself in an elevator with the CEO of Kimberly-Clark, and he will want to know what you are working on. You then have only 2 minutes (as long as the elevator ride lasts) to explain your project and its benefits. So we were asked to prepare this elevator speech in advance, so we did not have to think about it on the off change meeting of meeting with the CEO or anyone else who wanted to know.

Do we have our own elevator speeches prepared? To say in 2 minutes what the reason is for the hope that is in us? Why Jesus is important to us? People do not want to hear a theological discourse on the topic. They are interested in you and your hope, and it can only be you that can speak about your own relationship with Jesus. Mine will be different than yours: I will speak about when my mother had a near-death experience and that she at then of the tunnel of light saw Jesus. And that when she died I was completely convinced that she was with Jesus and that Jesus exists. But that is me. What about you? Maybe you want to spend sometime in prayer and ask Jesus what part of your relationship with him you can readily share. And then write it down for yourself and practice it in a two minute speech.

So that all of us are “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Amen.