

East Hartford  
6 Easter 2014 Memorial Day Weekend

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Acts 17:22-31, Psa 66, 1 Peter 3:13-22

### Always Be Ready

Two movements took firm hold in the United States one in 1910 the other in 1912, one for boys, the other for girls. These movements shared common values, methods and a common motto. What were the movements? Boy and Girl Scouts. What is the common motto? "Be Prepared." How many of us have some experience as members of Scout troops.

How many of us have made some preparations in case of power outages - batteries, candles etc. How many of us are prepared to fix a quick meal without having to go to the grocery store?

Someone writing in the name of the great disciple Peter, around the year 80 of the Common Era, called Christians to be prepared, to be ready to answer this question. "What is it about you Christians?? Why are you such hopeful people?"

The author of the letters of Peter put it this way. 1 Pet 3:15 *Make sure in your hearts that Christ is Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect.*

Friends, when this letter was written, being a Christian, belonging to Christ, was a risky business for those living in the Roman Empire.

Every so often there would come some persecution of the church. Becoming Christian always meant leaving some other established religion and often meant a disruption in the family. Christianity was suspect first because it was new, secondly it often challenged the social structure and values.

So why do it? Why risk one's standing in the community or the family?

Be prepared. *Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who demands an accounting for the hope that is within you . Be ready to give the reason for it with gentleness and respect.* Be prepared, be ready. 2000 years before Scouting would come into being, Christians were called to be prepared to answer for the hope and promise of this new faith.

What was the hope? We did not read Jesus' prayer for his disciples, from the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John - but I believe that prayer points to at least part of the hope. The promise of eternal life must have been part of that hope. I believe the church constituted part of the hope. The church would have been a distinctive community of people with close bonds and ties.

We've heard the idealized descriptions of the church -  
the having all things in common,  
the constancy of prayer,  
the frequent sharing of the eucharist,  
the preaching from the scriptures ie preaching from the psalms, the Law and the Prophets - the Jewish Scriptures were the only scriptures around.

What would it have been like to become part of a community which was a thousand times more egalitarian than the world around it?

As a minority faith, as a threatened minority people, the people of that early church must have become close, with much love and trust among them. They must have been as Jesus' prayer says, they must have been one, just as God, Christ and Spirit are three in the one. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* Acts 2:42

The hope, simply put, was both life eternal, and new life in the present. Life abundant in love, trust, and community. Life strengthened by courage and love, that is able to endure the inevitable suffering with

wisdom and grace.

Always be ready to answer for the hope that upholds and comforts you.

Why? Why should they, or you, or I, or anyone else be ready to answer for the hope that is the foundation of our lives?

Because that hope is good. That hope is gift from God, and such gifts are given to be shared. That hope, that faith, may be just the hope, the faith, the strength that another suffering human being needs to get thru the next hour or day of their lives and living.

Sharing hope multiplies the strength and power of hope in our lives and hope is what helps us resist aimlessness and despair, to choose a noble purpose. Hope shared is hope doubled at least. This is true for individuals and true for communities. All kinds of communities, families, churches, and nations.

Because sharing hope is a kindness. Remember that ancient admonition, "Be kind, for every person you meet is fighting a great battle." Sharing the hope that sustains is a great kindness. Sharing hope is an act of love.

Friends, in this time we rarely, if ever, find ourselves under persecution for the faith we hold, for the faith that holds us. Thankfully we are rarely, if ever, ostracized from our families for the faith. In this way our times are radically different from the times and people who first held this letter in hand.

I do say rarely - not never. For some, as a result of their faith do pay a high price. I'm just now reading a wonderful historical novel, "The Invention of Wings" by Sue Monk Kidd which tells the stories of some abolitionist women in the years leading up to the civil war; the prices they paid and the hope that sustained them.

I studied with the women who led the way to the ordination of

women in the Episcopal church. We can all recall the names of great leaders who were sustained by sacred hope. Nelson Mandela. Martin Luther King, Jr. and more.

Friends, I repeat myself.

Hope is nothing less than a gift of God, a gift that sustains us as individuals, a gift that empowers and strengthens love and Love's mission of justice and peace in the world.

Let us with deep confidence and trust in God, the Giver of Hope, the One who is Love, let us always be ready to acknowledge the source and give an accounting for the hope that sustains us and do it with love and respect.

This is what I would offer for the living of our lives as we stand at the eve of our national Day of Memory. Always Be Ready to account for the Hope that lives within.