

## *Trusting what he trusted*

*1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21*

Well, are you feeling “ready to make a defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting of that hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15b)? Are you ready to explain to others why you believe the Holy Spirit is alive and active in each one of us and in every person on earth? Probably, you can say *yes* to that question sometimes, and other times *no*. I am always so grateful that the Spirit is in everyone so that as our days come and go, and challenges and trials come and go, we can take turns being ready. We can take turns and together “make a defense to anyone who does demand from us an accounting for the hope that is in us.”

Making an account of the hope can be done in different ways. I am sure you have been cornered at least once in your life by someone who had to make sure that you knew about Jesus, in the “right” way. There’s always that awkward feeling: Well, I am a Christian but am I the right kind of Christian? Then there are other times where we see the Holy Spirit at work and there is no religious talk at all. Rather, we see someone (or creation) in action, and we think, “ah! There goes the Holy Spirit; active, healing our world.”

For those initial followers of Jesus, that is what happened. They knew the idea of the Spirit; the belief in the power of God’s breath had been in their religious faith traditions for generations and generations: *Ruah*, the Hebrew word for the breath of God. This breath of God was also known as wisdom in our scriptures and is described as a power present at creation (Proverbs 8). There was something about how Jesus lived, was faithful, and made an account of the hope that dwelt in him that made them understand even more how much God loved them, how much God would heal them and how much God wanted them to be a part of it.

We are asked to witness, to confess, to testify. These are all words that come out of the Christian tradition. The formal word for it is evangelism. Like all good English words it’s been around the block a few times and so I want to remind us of what today’s reading from the community around Peter teaches about witnessing. “You need to be ready to make a defence,” to say why you have such hope that the Holy Spirit loves you and all people and is healing creation. Yet you must do that sharing, testifying, with gentleness and reverence. And I do not believe here that Peter is asking us to have reverence only for God while we talk to humans. I believe the wisdom here is that we need to be gentle and reverent with one another as well. And so, while I want to witness and testify and be evangelical, I need to do that in the Spirit of Christ.

Let us do it in the Spirit of Jesus, one who went about not saying, “you are healed, and you are healed.” Jesus was the one who went around and said, “what would you like, what are you asking of me, would you like to be well?” Even Jesus knew that defending his faith, and the fact that he knew hope existed through the Holy Spirit, always happens *in relationship* with one another. And so, we are to make an account of why it is that we feel hope in this time to follow Jesus.

On those days when we doubt, when we are not ready to make an accounting...we have a community to support us. This is why we still tune in to worship, why I love to hear us all saying the Lord's prayer together? On days my defence is not ready, I turn to my tradition and community. I hear in scripture and see beside me the wise people I know and they make an account of their hope. In community, we can hear others' defense of hope: of the times in their lives when God seemed absent but was highly active that when they look back, they see God all over the place.

I can learn to make an account and a defence for hope because of these people and their teachings. Some of them, like people who helped put together the library called the Bible, I have never met. Some of them I have had the honor to meet. People who have invited me to be part of their journey in life even on the hardest of their days. As pastor, a priest, or a minister I am invited to bear witness to their struggle to find hope or their amazement at God's presence.

We are in a time now where it is important for us to look back and make an accounting. Let us record those times in our life, or the life of someone you trust and respect, where God's presence and power for healing has been made known - even though in the middle of the Spirit's work, we or they may not have known.

This past month has brought up many anniversaries for me. I have an anniversary of fleeing Slave Lake nine years ago. We were quite certain, we'd never go back home, and we got to go home, but to such a different hometown. Looking back, I can see how the Spirit helped us stay together, helped us make meaning in our mourning and lamentations. This month also brings anniversaries of many ordinations. The United Church of Canada often meets at this time of year in its regional groups to ordain, to commission and recognize those who are in ordered ministry. This year as I celebrate another anniversary of ordination I marvel, I marvel at how God took me, formed me, placed gifts in me and - against all of my defences - snuck into my life anyways and called me into ministry. I think of the communities that call continuously on their members when they see gifts of the Spirit alive and say: you have a call from God. Now this isn't always for ministry. Sometimes this is you need to serve on this committee because its wisdom is needing your voice.

How God has called you to serve the world in this time? Listening to you this week, I have heard voices of people who are called to get up every morning and to drive, walk or bus into a workplace. For some of them, that means walking into a place where they are then covered in plastics and other materials to protect them from an invisible virus and they're called to go through the virus and the people with it and find the hearts (physical and emotional) of the people in their midst. They're the ones holding the hands of the people I usually hold hands with when I visit. They are

holding the hands of people who cannot come home yet and at the end of each of their days they need to find the courage to clean, change clothing and return home, which takes a different kind of courage.

Now others of you have had to take upon yourself a new vocation. Perhaps you are teaching someone in your home, who you used to parent and now you're doing both. Perhaps this is a time where you had to take up being an elder. Is someone else buying your groceries at this time and you are having to stay at home; wanting to go out and show everyone your health and independence, but you aren't allowed to and so you're trying to model elder humility for us? Wherever God has called you to be, I pray that you are listening for the Spirit, that you are looking back at the times in your life and your community's life when you have made it through because of God's active power.

I pray too that you can look a little way forward. How will your life be changing in the coming six weeks as some rules shift, and some don't. How are we called to take care of one another at this time? And how is God in your life right now, helping you show up at work every day amid the anxiety of your community, during an illness that is scary and deadly. How is God helping you regulate the emotions of isolation and how is God calling you to ask for help when you need it?

No matter whether you are called to make physically courageous acts or spiritually courageous acts, or both, God truly is with you and Jesus has not left you orphaned. Christ and the Holy Spirit are grounding you, rooting you down. Yet the Spirit is also blowing through you like the wind in that purple cloth. May Jesus' surprise of the Holy Spirit guide you, comfort you and may we find ways to account for this blessed hope we have in our lives.