

What is Your Hope?

May 21, 2017 | 6th Sunday of Easter (Confirmation)

P. W. Schmidt, are you prepared? For those of you who don't know P. W., there is one thing you'll notice about him right away. He is always prepared. He loves technology and whether its his laptop, his i phone, or his retro game consoles, he always comes prepared: He will have extension cords, power adapters, spare batteries, you name it all packed away in a duffle bag. Last month we had a youth nerf event and P. W. came prepared... he brought his nerf gun, spare darts, a tent, and his bag of retro consuls just in case. Today, on your confirmation day the Holy Spirit encourages you to be prepared not just electronically, but spiritually. Be prepared by knowing your hope. And just what is your hope? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15-22.

1 Peter 3:15-22

15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Now I alluded to this before, but there is one more very important piece to understanding P. W... video games. P. W. is passionate about video games, especially the good old fashion retro games: Games like the original Legend of Zelda. Now, I know not everyone here today plays video games, but I want to tell you a little bit about the appeal to them. There are these things called levels, and as you play through the game your character progresses from level to level and each level gets more and more challenging. It forces the gamer to improve their game in order to pass on to the next level. Usually at the end of each level there will be what's called a "boss" a big bad guy that will put all of your video game skills to the test. But how do you beat each boss? Well, there is always a pattern. At a certain time the boss will unleash a big attack, and you know to look for the warning sings so you can get to safety. By studying the patters, you learn to anticipate the game so you can get your character safely through each level. Gaming is all about looking for and recognizing the patterns. And there are two patterns for us to consider as we look at these words from 1 Peter. Two people who were prepared to face whatever life sent their way because they knew their hope.

The first is Noah. We are told that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) who lived several generations before Abraham. Noah was a man who was surrounded by a

world and people whose “every inclination of the heart was evil” (Gen. 6:5). As a consequence, God had told Noah that He would send a flood on the earth to destroy every living thing, but God graciously allowed 120 years before this disaster came for Noah to witness his faith. Sadly, his witness was rejected. We can only imagine what ridicule Noah was subjected to while he was building an giant ark to protect his family. But all the while, Noah trusted that God’s Word was true—that though he suffered for a time, God would deliver him. That deliverance finally came in the form of the flood, which through the safety of the ark, lifted Noah and his family above the destruction.

The second pattern is Jesus. Jesus was the preacher of righteousness. No one has ever, no one can ever compare to Jesus’ perfect witness as true man and true God. Not only were his words perfect, but His preaching was accompanied by powerful miracles—even raising the dead to life! But was that enough? Jesus was still rejected. His own brothers rejected Him, His home town tried to kill him, ultimately for His preaching of righteousness, Jesus was put to death in the flesh—the just for the unjust. Jesus was killed on a cross. Yet what carried Jesus through that difficult ordeal? He knew He would be vindicated—that means proven right. God would raise Jesus from the dead, He would be made alive according to the spirit. He would go and publicly show Himself to the spirits in prison—the demons and even the people who rejected and made fun of Noah—to say, “See, Noah was right!” Finally, just as Noah was lifted up into heaven by the water, Jesus was lifted into heaven to sit at God’s right hand.

So here’s the pattern: faithful witness—both Noah and Jesus faithfully witnessed to their generation. Rejection—both men suffered for doing good; Noah was just ignored, Jesus was put to death. Personal salvation—God personally rescued both men; Noah and his family were lifted up by the water in the ark, Jesus was raised to life. Faithful witness, rejection, personal salvation. This pattern has repeated itself for every saint and Christian since the beginning of time. But how will this pattern influence your game play?

First, there will be your faithful witness. P.W. gave a faithful witness on Wednesday evening; he publicly confessed his faith before all present. Jesus promises, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). That public confession, that faithful witness is what confirmation is all about. But, P.W. the real test, the real confirmation is not something that happens in the safety of the Church. It happens in real life. Yes, we can test to see if you know the right answers in church, but the real test comes when we have to apply those answers in real life. And that is difficult. Its one thing to say, “you shall have no other gods,” “honor the Sabbath day,” “you shall not commit adultery” but another to live by them. In this way, confirmation is not a one time event, but your faith will be confirmed again, and again, and again... the Lord will provide opportunities for us to make a faithful witness in your words and actions. And let me tell you something else; you are surrounded by people who have failed those tests. Every single week. Multiple times every week. And that’s why we will always find us here in church, because we need God’s forgiveness. And that’s why we will look for your face in church with us, because you will need God’s forgiveness.

Secondly, there will be moments of rejection. These are all very hard, and can be

heartbreaking when it is our own family and friends that reject our witness. P.W. has often shared with me the different times he's witnessed his faith in the six day creation with his friends. Often times the response can be ridicule and mockery. But don't be discouraged, because no witness is ever given in vain. Often times the Holy Spirit uses our witness in the last way we would expect. Though everyone else rejected Noah, his family believed. Though Jesus' family and nation rejected Him, many "outsiders" (people who were not Jews) came to faith through His witness. Just as Jesus our victorious Savior vindicated Noah—He took special time to say Noah was right, He will do the same for you. He will publicly vindicate you on judgment day and show all people on earth you are right.

Finally P.W., what is your hope? What will carry you through all tests, all moments of weakness, all moments of rejection? Your personal salvation. This has already been accomplished for you when Jesus your Savior died for you. Just as Noah was lifted up by the water and Jesus was lifted up from the dead and ascended into heaven in glory, God gives you personal victory today through your Baptism. Not just a symbolic washing of water but God's mighty act of personal deliverance He will work again and again and again in your life. It is the promise of a clear conscience before God in heaven. Your stains of sin have been washed away in the blood of the lamb. Baptism saves you through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; He has had victory, so you will have victory. He sits in glory in Heaven now; you will sit in glory in heaven.

So, level one: complete. But the game is just beginning. Your confirmation verse is Philippians 3:14 "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." You are prepared for the levels to follow. You are prepared to press on towards the final goal—the end prize of heaven. To ensure and strengthen your resolve in your daily struggle, the Congregation of Redeeming Grace Lutheran Church invites you into full communicant fellowship. You are invited to participate in the Sacrament of the Altar—that Jesus Christ who strengthens and preserves each one of us, may more personally assure you He is your personal Savior. Amen.