

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for May 10, 2026
1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21 - "Hope Revealed"

Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the Triune God. Amen.

Peter is probably the most celebrated of all Jesus' disciples. He is always listed first among the twelve, he features prominently in many Gospel stories, and he becomes the cornerstone of the post-Easter church.

Peter was ultimately martyred in Rome under the emperor Nero. Nero was the fifth Roman emperor and final emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. He is best known for his political murders and a passion for music that led to the rumor that Nero "fiddled" while Rome burned during the great fire of 64 CE. Nero was also a persecutor of Christians. When Peter wrote the words "always be ready with an answer", it was a very dangerous time to be a Christian, as Nero liked to blame everything that went wrong in the Roman Empire on the followers of Christ.

Over the last few weeks, we have been reading from Peter's first letter. Peter's audience was Gentile Christians in Asia Minor (a geographic region located in the south-western part of Asia comprising most of present-day Turkey) who were suffering for their faith. The letter was meant to provide them encouragement from someone who knows a bit about suffering and who can testify to them about God's grace. Peter pressed this community to remain steadfast in living honourably and ethically in spite of hostility from unbelievers.

Throughout the letter, Peter offers suggestions that might help make life bearable for his readers. Specifically in today's reading, Peter tells his readers that they should be ready to give a defense of the gospel that sustains them, that they must show that they are different in a positive way, that they should concentrate on conducting themselves honourably, so that those who ridicule them will see their honourable deeds and be put to shame, (or possibly converted).

Peter wanted his audience to remain faithful to Christ even in the face of pressures to conform to the larger world's social and religious values. He asked his readers to have courage, to have compassion and gentleness and respect for their assailants, to live lives beyond reproach, to follow the teachings of Jesus, and to love their enemies to the point of death. Those oppressed by the empire were encouraged to respond to their persecution by imitating Christ. By saying "always be ready for an answer", Peter was urging his readers to fearlessly defend hope, the hope given to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope given to us through the eternal love of God.

Peter knew that his people would be questioned about the way they were acting. He knew that they would be subject to interrogation about their unconventional lives. But shouldn't our lives inspire others to ask questions? Christians are called to live just lives that are above reproach. How we live becomes our best defense against those questioning us. Few among us live under the threat of death, but if we seek to live out our faith in the world, we may indeed encounter systems that oppose our witness. We may not be being persecuted as Peter's readers were in 1st century Rome, but there are likely those of us out there who have been questioned by friends, family, and maybe even strangers about why we believe in God, why we believe in Jesus, why we are Christian.

How do you respond when someone asks you about being a Christian? Do you become apologetic? Defensive? Do you run away from the conversation? We don't need to have all the answers. But we need to be willing to talk about it. With each other, with friends and family, with anyone who asks us the question. Having the answer to every question doesn't prove why we are Christian. Living our life the way Jesus taught us shows others why we are Christian.

Our confidence and trust in God's absolute love for us is revealed through our actions toward others. If we work for justice, if we are doing what is right, we can be sure that our lives are in God's hands, and that God will have the last word. Christ walks with us in our daily lives. He has already won the victory. Our task is to remain faithful and wait for God's triumph to be revealed to the world. The author of 1st Peter encourages his audience, and all of us, to maintain this faithfulness. No matter what trials we may endure we are not to be intimidated. We trust that Jesus lived and died for all of us.

We see this faithfulness also in John's words of hope. Jesus comforts his disciples with words of promise. Once they no longer see Jesus in physical form, he will always be with his disciples through their faith. Jesus' address in the original Greek is in the plural, meaning that he is encouraging his disciples of every age as a community, to know they will never be alone. Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit will be with them always. "You will know that I am in God, and you in me, and I in you." This is a comfort to all of us who are challenged with the struggles in this world. For we have that divine presence in us as well. All who are willing to trust in Christ, even though he is not physically present, will be saved and embraced by the loving arms of God. Whatever struggles we face, our triune God is with us always. We who share faith and hope in Jesus Christ are assured of being welcomed into this continual ever flowing dance with the divine.

And that is good news indeed. Amen.