

**“Be Ready with an Answer”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

May 17, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – May 17, 2020**

“My Hope is Built on Nothing Less #349 in the Book of Praise, Vv. 1, 2 & 4

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name

*Refrain:*

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand;

All other ground is sinking sand

When darkness hides his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace;

In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil.

*Refrain:*

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand;

All other ground is sinking sand

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in him be found

Clothed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne!

*Refrain:*

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand;

All other ground is sinking sand

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“Open my Eyes, that I May See” #500 in the Book of Praise, Vv. 2 & 3

Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear,  
And while the wave notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.

*Refrain:*

Silently now I wait for thee,  
Ready, my God, thy will to see;  
Open my ears: illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;  
Open my heart and let me prepare love with Thy children thus to share.

*Refrain:*

Silently now I wait for thee,  
Ready, my God, thy will to see;  
Open my heart: illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

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“I am the Church! You are the Church!” #475 in the Book of Praise, Vv. 1, 2 & 4

*Refrain:*

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!  
All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!

The church is not a building; the church is not a steeple;  
The church is not a resting place; the church is a people.

*Refrain:*

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!  
All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!

We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces,  
All colours and all ages, too, from all times and places.

*Refrain:*

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!  
All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!

(continued...)

And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying;

There's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying:

*Refrain:*

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!

All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!

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### **Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 3:13-22 (NIV)**

*<sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—<sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

### **John 14:15-21**

*<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."*

## **Meditation**

There are times when I really like to watch press conferences. It may seem an odd thing to say, or maybe you feel the same way, but really, press conferences are meant to provide information the public wants to hear and they often give us insight into the character of the person behind the podium. We've seen our fair share of them over the past many weeks as leaders at every level of government and in the world are trying to keep us informed of the status of the pandemic; the toll it is taking on us, the work being done to create a vaccine, how society is going to work toward re-opening, and so on.

Sometimes this type of media event is difficult to watch – if there is a sad announcement to be made or an update to a situation where people are hurting. It was hard to hear the updates after the shootings in Nova Scotia. It is difficult to hear of the high level of loss in long term care residences in these days. I remember my dad, who spent his career in sports and news media, making a comment about how hard it was to cover a particular story because of the personal tragedy involved. These are the press conferences and media releases that are difficult for us to take in. These are not the ones I enjoy watching.

It's the ones that do not tell stories of tragedy that I enjoy, and sometimes find rather entertaining, if I'm being honest about it. These are the media moments that mostly serve the purpose of connecting the public with celebrities, popular athletes, even politicians in a way that makes them seem a little more reachable, that give us some idea of what they are like as "real" people. And the best moments seem to come when the event opens up for questions from the media, or when something unexpected happens. In one such moment, an NBA star was taking questions after a game, and his young daughter, sitting on his lap, decided it was her turn to take the mic – which she did, prompting some giggling from the media. Dad put her down and turned his attention back to the mic. The little girl, however, still thought she should be getting the spotlight. She found the edge of the curtain behind her dad, and proceeded to walk into it so that it dragged over her head as she made her way behind the basketball star again. Dad, however, had no idea she was behind him and continued to answer questions, until the media started to laugh, at which point he turned around, saw his precocious daughter in action, and turned back to the mic with a smile and said, "I think we're done here. I don't even remember what the question was. She's stealing the show anyway." At which point, to her delight, he picked her up, they grinned and waved at the reporters, and off they went.

The question time can really put people on the spot. You have to be able to think fast when you're in the so-called hot seat. The press fires questions at you and you have to be ready with an answer.

What are you going to do about...

Why did you choose that approach...

Did you prepare for that scenario in practice...

Do you have a plan for...

You can fill in the blanks, I'm sure.

Being interviewed can be daunting. The interviewer sometimes asks questions that are tough to answer. Being the interviewee means being able to think on your feet, and ready with an answer even if you're not ready for the question. Sometimes, if an interviewee isn't ready for the question, the answer can be somewhat unfiltered and revealing!

The reading from 1 Peter today tells us that we are always in the proverbial hot seat, and that we need to be ready with a response when we are asked questions about our relationship with God. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (v. 15).*

Have you ever been asked about your faith, your hope, your outlook on life and been ready with an answer that gives glory to God? It can catch us off guard because I don't think many people even think to ask.

They may put it down to the power of positive thinking, which may be true, but where does the positive perspective come from?

They may say it is an inner strength that creates a joyful attitude, which may be true, but where does the strength come from?

They may say it is simply our personality to be hopeful and positive, which may be true, but where does our personality come from?

It isn't a nature vs. nurture question. It is a question of the source of our joy, our strength, our view of humanity. All that we have and all that we are comes from God, and so our personality, our character, our ability to hold onto hope comes from faith in God. All other influences are external enhancements, or distractions, in these things.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. Our strength comes from trust and faith in God, who is powerful enough to conquer all things, even sin, even death, through the risen Christ.

Several years ago, at a national youth event, I was asked to participate in a Q&A time with another event leader. My conversation partner was there in his role as regional staff in another part of Ontario, and I was there with my ordained Minister hat on. We were to interview each other in front of a group of young people considering leadership in the church. At one point my colleague asked if I had ever considered another career, and I told him what the top three careers on my high school aptitude test were: #1 was teacher, #2 was pastor, #3 was a bus driver. So I said I had originally thought I would like

to teach high school, and I wasn't quite sure how bus driver fit in! I thought it was a perfectly acceptable answer, until he said that he easily saw where driving a bus would show up on that list. He said, with a smile, it would be less stressful than being a minister – people have to pay before they get their service, and I'd want them to sit at the back! Talk about thinking on your feet. It completely changed the tone of the conversation.

I often hear people say they don't know how people without faith in Jesus get through the hard times. What do they hold onto?

I wonder, do we ever ask these people that question?

Would we be prepared to hear the answer?

What happens when the opposite occurs... when people wonder how we are getting through the tough times, and they ask. What would you say? Be aware, your response may completely change the tone of the conversation!

Periodically I am asked how I help other people through the difficult times of their lives – illness, grief, crisis – and still manage to attend to the needs of my congregation and family. Well, to be honest, there are times when I don't feel I'm managing all of that very well at all, but through a variety of ways, God's grace keeps me going. I could stop with that statement and it would say it all. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. If I'm talking with someone whose life reflects the same faith and assurance, it makes sense. But if I'm talking with someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus, or who is curious about one, I probably need to explain that I don't experience supernatural occurrences of extreme strength, but that God puts people and experiences in my path that give me what I need, if I'm open to receiving them. I may not even know what I need, but God does.

Through my family's wise observations, God shows me where I need to take a step back and refocus on what is truly important.

Through a well-timed phone call, God speaks a word of encouragement in the kind voice of a friend.

Through an expression of gratitude, God reminds me why I do what I do, and how rewarding it is.

Through colleagues, God extends wisdom and challenge in the midst of situations that force me to recognize there is only so much I can do, or to trust in the gifts I have been given.

Through this congregation, God has shown compassion and understanding in times when I really felt overwhelmed and was floundering around in a sea of chaos.

Through times of quiet prayer, God has surrounded me with a feeling of warmth and peace, and calms my busy mind.

These are only some of the ways I know I will get through the difficult times in life, and be able to help others too. God will give me what I need to serve him well, and to grow and mature in my own faithfulness.

God speaks and acts in our lives, and we must not be afraid to talk about it, to reflect on our experiences, recognizing that God is in the midst of it all. When people wonder how we do it, how we cope with life in all of its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, celebrations and challenges, we have an answer at the ready. We do it by the grace of God, the very real assurance of being loved and led and cared for by the One who sent his Son into this world be a very real gift of grace. Because Christ did what he did to bring us to God, we certainly can be ready with an answer for the source and reason for our hope.

What is the reason for our hope? It's the grace of our loving God, most fully revealed in the gift of the risen Jesus who has given us every reason to hold onto hope, by the power of his Spirit with which we are blessed through faith in him. Amen.