

Peter said that he and his fellow fishermen were working hard all night. But working hard isn't necessarily good. If you never see any results, then what's the point? It's just empty labor, toiling, sweating, and growing more and more anxious for what is uncertain. They didn't catch any fish all night. They were tired. They wanted to turn in. But Jesus told them to cast their nets again. They had nothing to show for all their working, nothing to gain from their spent-up energy, nothing to rest their weary heads on. All they had was the Word of Jesus. This was their only hope.

So Peter said, "At your word I will let down the nets." Then they pulled up more fish than their nets or boats could handle. Their labors were all in vain. But the Word of Jesus was not in vain. Their hard work brought them nothing but despair. But Jesus' words gave them hope.

Hope is closely associated with fear. You see, both of these things have to do with what you expect to happen. You hope such or such thing might happen. All the while, you fear that something else might happen. You hope your investments will grow. You fear the market won't go your way. You hope she says yes to your proposal. You fear she might say no. Hope and fear are both part of waiting. And they always accompany one another to some extent.

True and lasting hope, on the other hand, is certainty of your salvation. It is to have faith in God's promise as you wait patiently for Christ to appear. It is knowing that God has already accomplished it, that Christ has already saved you, that your sins are already forgiven, and that there is an eternal inheritance waiting for you in heaven. Peter speaks of such hope in his first epistle. He says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused us to be reborn to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Pet 1:3)

He calls this hope an undefiled and imperishable inheritance, which is kept in heaven for us who are being preserved in the faith by the power of God for this salvation ready to be revealed on the last day. Peter learned about this hope. God gave it to him. And this hope did not put him to shame. He would have every reason to toil, work hard, suffer, and lose all things in this world, all the while having the confidence that his labors are not in vain. Because he knew what lay ahead.

It is crucial for the Christian life to have this hope of your heavenly inheritance. Nothing you do has any lasting meaning without it. In fact, it gives us all the reason for doing what God has called us to do. It shapes our focus for every task. It gives meaning to every affliction, every tear, every heartache, and every joy in this life. Because you know that God is working all things out according to his good purpose. You have his sure promise that he has chosen you in Christ Jesus from before the foundations of the world to be cleansed of your sins and share with him in everything he has won for you. Our Lutheran Confessions put it so well when they say the following:

God in His counsel, before the time of the world, determined and decreed that He would assist us in all distresses, grant patience under the cross, give consolation, nourish and encourage hope, and produce such an outcome as would contribute to our salvation. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI, 48)

This is sure hope. It is confidence in what lies ahead. It's a divinely given purpose, which comes from the very heart of God. And as long as we have this promise, radiating from Christ's empty tomb, poured on our heads in baptism, placed on our tongues in the Sacrament of the Altar, and treasured in our hearts by faith, we can be sure that this hope will not ever fail us.

Yes, this hope gives us confidence in our labors. Even when you stand in the place of Peter, toiling all night with nothing to show for it, this is only God testing your faith and strengthening your patience. It's exactly why you need this hope in everything you do. Because if your business tanks, and you lose all the money you hoped was secure, God is simply teaching you to find your treasure in what he has prepared for you in heaven, not in the fleeting riches of this world. And when you worry about your children, wanting them to get through school, hold a good job, find a good spouse, and hopefully not screw up, it is the desire that your children are kept in the faith, which surpasses any other earthly blessings you might hope for them. When you strive to do a good job for your boss, hoping that he notices your progress and overlooks the times when you slacked off or made mistakes, it is the hope of your heavenly inheritance, which gives you the assurance that you are serving your loving Savior who died for you and covers up all your shame.

Yes, you need this hope in every task you do. But of all the duties God gives you in this life, there is one, which far surpasses the others in its need for this heavenly hope. This is the duty of confessing Christ and his Word. It's much greater than what you do with your hands. It is about what comes out of your mouth. It is a confession of what you treasure in your heart. As the Psalmist says, "If anyone wants to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. (Ps 34)" No other task relies on this hope, which Christ's Word gives, than the act of confessing his Word of truth.

This is why Peter tells us to prepare for it. Be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks. Be prepared to defend what you believe, to speak about what you hope for. Because when people don't listen, when they lose interest, or when they even get angry at what you say, what are you going to do? When you spend hours, days, weeks, months, and even years explaining what you believe to someone, hoping that he will embrace the same truth you treasure in the gospel, but he ends up throwing it in your face or cutting ties with you, what are you going to do? Are you going to say with Peter, "I toiled all night, but I caught nothing?" Are you going to despair and conclude that God's Word must not have worked? When everyone around you treats the gospel you count so precious to be nothing but old, worn out, irrelevant fairytales, are you going to give up? Are you going to keep quiet and go along to get along?

God forbid it! Remember what God says about his Word. He promises that it will not return empty. Keep in mind that Christ was rejected and despised by men. Remember that St. Paul calls the Word of the cross foolishness to those who are perishing. But to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It is our lasting hope. And it won't put us to shame.

So how do you prepare for this great task? You hold onto your only hope. Set Christ in your heart as the holy Lord. Rest in him. Find in him that peace with God, which surpasses all understanding. He will prepare you to speak. And you won't need to be afraid of any threats, any odd looks, or any cold responses. Because Christ is Lord. He alone is to be feared. And as

the same Psalm sings, “Those who fear the Lord lack nothing good.” This is because we have the highest good in him. In his gospel, in his righteousness, in his blood shed for our salvation, we have an eternal inheritance, the forgiveness of all our sins, and the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies and everlasting life. Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for this? What can possibly disappoint you if you have this as your treasure?

When Jesus caused the great catch of fish, Peter’s tired and toilsome despair was turned into a frantic fear. He bowed before Jesus and called him Lord. But his fear wasn’t driven by hope. He was tormented. He said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”

This is another reason why we need this hope in everything we do, especially when we must confess his Word. Peter was being called to be a minister of the Word. And he knew that he was altogether unworthy of it. No one is worthy to speak for the living God. It’s a terrifying duty. Whether you are called to be a public minister like Peter and other pastors of the church, or you are in a position to give an answer to anyone who asks, it is a very serious task. God’s Word isn’t a plaything. And God is serious when he warns that those who take his name in vain will not go unpunished. So it’s easy for your conscience to be burdened and weighed down by guilt and sin. Because when you are meditating on God’s Word and talking about it, these topics come up all the time. The law is always accusing the conscience. And it’s not like you can avoid the law. If you’re talking about God’s Word and pursuing what is good, then you are going to be talking about the law. And you are going to see how sinful you are.

But this is all God’s work. He works through his Word to make you humble. He teaches you to fear him. Yet he doesn’t leave you in despair. He gives you hope. When Peter lay at the feet of Jesus, asking him to go away, Jesus provided Peter with his hope. “Don’t be afraid,” he said, “from now on you will be catching men.” This gave Peter hope for his great task. It gave him a good conscience. Peter would rely on these words of Jesus. Especially after he failed and fell short, his hope was still built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

So Peter urges us, “Be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you of the hope that is in you, but do so with meekness and fear, having a good conscience.” This meekness comes from knowing that we are unworthy, no better than those who are interrogating us. But this fear is not a fear of men. It is a fear of God with the sure and certain hope in the inheritance he has prepared for you in Christ. You can therefore have a good conscience. You have been baptized into Christ. His blood has washed you clean. So even though you have no sufficiency coming from yourself, your sufficiency is in him.

Whatever God calls you to do, he invites you to do it in hope, not in despair. Investments still dry up. Children still disobey. Bosses still get on your case. Spouses still fail each other. People still reject the Word you confess. And your conscience still gets burdened. This is our life in this fallen world. But it is not without hope. Though we leave behind everything we ever worked for in this life, we still know what is before us. Christ’s Word continues to gather us all by his gracious net. And no matter how much we must toil in this life, we can be certain that God is working it all out for our good. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Amen.