

Kyle Bernd  
High School Senior  
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1 Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21

## Sermon

Hello, good morning everyone! I would like to quickly share a little bit about myself before I start. My name is Kyle and I have been a part of this congregation for 16 years, pretty much my whole life. I am a graduating senior this year, and I will be attending UW in the fall. I would like to thank my parents for helping me along this journey of faith which has led me here, and I definitely could not have been standing here before you all without them.

Now, our readings today of Acts, First Peter, and John shares with us a story. Our reading from Acts says that there is only one true God and He is almighty and we mustn't think of him as an image made by human design and skill, for he is much more. The next reading from First Peter then says it is not easy to love and stay true to God, you will have to suffer along the way, but by the resurrection of Jesus Christ you will be saved. Finally our reading from John says that God has sent an advocate to be with us, which is the Holy Spirit which lives within us all.

The insight I saw from these readings was that no matter what happens, the Lord will always love you, and our goal as a person of faith is to in turn love Him. The trouble is that people can not deal with the suffering described in First Peter that one will encounter. A recent study done by Frank Newport, a news reporter shows that over the last 7 years in the US, the Christian religion has decreased 5% and Atheism in turn has risen 5%. That is over 16 million people! Why? You might ask. The answer is inside of our reading from First Peter. Verses 15-17 which says *“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.”*

The line “For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” stood out to me. People have a hard time going through something tough now, to achieve something better in the future, people are just near sighted in that sense. Because of this, we are hearing of these statistics saying that 5% of the Christian population has left the church. God has never portrayed the road to loving Him as an easy one, you have to be persistent, and have grit to stay true to your love for the Lord, but it is truly worth the temporary suffering as John said in Verse 21 “The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Just like from First Peter, the road to loving Jesus is a tough one as you must keep His commands, but in the end it will be worth the pain as you will experience the love from our Father as proven through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. My personal favorite description of Heaven and God’s glory is explained by Maria Faustina Kowalska of Poland, as she said “The glory of God is so great that I dare not try to describe it, because I would not be able to do so, and souls might think that what I have written is all there is.”

The reading that caught my attention today was First Peter Chapter 3, Verses 13-22. This passage specifically Verse 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” this triggered a story that I would like to share with the congregation today.

I was sitting with my peers in my statistics class on a cold winter’s day back a couple of months ago. I do not know how it came up, but we got on the topic of religion. Being just the three of us at a table, everyone had plenty of time to express their respected opinions, and that means mine as well. It just so turned out that I was

the only religious one of the bunch! When I told them I was Lutheran, they said “What? I have never heard of that before!” So I explained it to them as best as I could within their attention spans.

Then the hailstorm of questions came upon me, I was asked everything from “Why would you spend your time at church on a Sunday when you have all of this homework?” and “Was Martin Luther a man or a woman?” And also the backhanded questions such as “I am an Atheist and I think that being religious is a waste of time, what do you think?” Taking into account our reading for today: First Peter, I was prepared to give my answers both gently and with respect, for if I responded rashly, I would have lost my credibility with them and their open minds. When all was said and done, I did not try to persuade them that I was correct and they were wrong, I simply gave them the answers of why I have the hope that I have. This is all you can do.

Going to school in a public school system my whole life has given me plenty of different experiences and opinions about religion, some more educated than others, and I know that more are just waiting to come at my time at UW in the future. Following the word of the Lord will guide me to responding respectfully to those future situations, this is something we can all improve upon. Everyone in the congregation today has most likely experienced situations like this, and our reading today gives us the guidance on how to handle those situations. Especially the young ones in the congregation, take special care to remember First Peter Chapter Three, for you will most certainly experience these sorts of encounters.

Jesus gave us all a promise in John Chapter 14 Verse 16 and 18 that we are not alone in this journey and that Jesus has sent an Advocate to be with us, the Spirit of truth, and that we will never be orphaned. We have a community here at Peace and also in our faith that we are a part of and THAT gives us strength and hope. Thank you.