

6 Easter A 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Has anyone called you to account? "\$350 is missing from your cash register – explain." "What makes you so sure that you can finish this project in three months?" "Convince me why I should believe you."

When we are called to account we have to provide proof. Receipts. Evidence. An explanation. "I gave two checks, one for \$200 and one for \$150, to the assistant manager at 4 p.m." "My team is well informed, we have completed all our other projects, we have all the supplies we need, and we have timed out the project so we can get it done in 10.5 weeks; so we have some leeway, in order to meet the three month deadline." "I have never lied to you before."

Some of the time when we are called to account, we don't have an answer that makes us look good. Sometimes we have done what the person accusing us suspects. We have sinned. If we are honest, we recognize that our sin has led to a breach between us and those who trusted us. There are consequences for such a breach. Sometimes the consequence is jail. Restitution, paying back what we owe. Almost always a loss of trust is a consequence. For instance, I will never trust my brother again. Long story – but that is how it ends.

Our readings for today speak about accounting, and about judgment, and about keeping commandments. And there will be an accounting, a judgment, on earth and in heaven. We have some familiarity with the judgment on earth – how others regard us if we disappoint them or hurt them. Accounting in heaven will be different. Peter assures his readers in the middle of the second reading: "Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." With God, in heaven, we will be alive in the spirit, as Peter mentions later. That is the good news that Peter and Paul and virtually all of the followers of Jesus from their time to ours, have proclaimed. "Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." In the final accounting, our sins are covered by Christ. That \$350 missing from the cash register – covered. The lies and betrayals – covered. That is the good news, and the source of our hope as Christians.

When Peter wrote to some of the early converts to Christianity, he encouraged them to "be ready to" explain the impact of Jesus in their lives "to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." For hope in someone like Jesus was unusual in the world at that time. They hoped in someone who healed people in body and spirit. Their hope was in Jesus, who told strange stories about God caring for obvious sinners and also showed extreme personal care for obvious sinners. Jesus also suffered and died. And was raised from death by God's power. Peter knew that the readers of his letter would be questioned, called to account for their hope that even though they suffered, God still intended good for them. Peter wanted them to be ready to be a witness for their faith in Jesus Christ. As he was. And as Paul was. We know how Peter and Paul ended up: crucified, like their dear Lord Jesus. They were crucified because they

would not stop talking about Jesus, and encouraging others to put their full trust in Jesus as the beloved of the only true God. When you are willing to be crucified for the sake of the hope in Christ that is in you, that is hope that is worth an accounting.

As any of us who have read the New Testament know, Paul was not always careful with his word choice. He could be very blunt. But not in our first reading. Here, Paul is in Athens, home of great philosophers, poets, sculptors, and architects. The Areopagus is on the side of the hill, between the agora, the great marketplace of Athens, where Socrates went on trial, and the Acropolis, site of the Parthenon and other temples. In this speech, Paul is inspired. He demonstrates that he knows his audience, complimenting them on their religious concerns. And he uses various proofs to convince them that the unknown god they worship is the same as the God he worships: God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit – made known through the appointed man, Jesus Christ. This masterful speech is how Paul gave the accounting for the hope that was in him. Any of us who wonder how to share the good news of what God has done in Jesus should study and reflect on this speech.

The Advocate promised by Jesus in today's gospel had already come by the time Peter and Paul began talking about what God had done through Jesus. Advocate means speaking to, speaking for. The Advocate, the Spirit of truth, helped to provide the words for Paul. And Peter. The Advocate has helped to provide words and God's own Spirit of truth for all who love the Christ ever since. May the Advocate continue to be with all who seek to live in the love of Christ and account for their hope. Amen