

## Column

Peter wrote famously in his first epistle: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (3:15). That is the Christian apologist’s mandate and mantra. But I don’t think I would do violence to the text to say this verse contains a clarion call to preachers in general. One never knows when one will be called on to ‘preach the Word’, so one always needs to be ready.

At least three times in my life I have found myself in a situation where I was called upon to deliver a sermon or conduct a service of public worship with little or no notice. The first time occurred several decades ago when I slipped into a small college chapel for the morning service. I was immediately recognized, and a lay leader whispered that the chaplain had been called away unexpectedly. He had left instructions for me to give the sermon should I appear. During the scripture readings and hymns, I collected my thoughts and mounted the pulpit at the appropriate time.

On a second occasion, in the '90s, I was in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Prior to Sunday, I rang up the Anglican chaplaincy to find out about service times. Upon arrival at a chapel shared with the Roman Catholics, I was welcomed and asked if there was to be Holy Communion that day.

“Why am I being asked this question?” I thought. Quickly, I discovered the reason: the clergyman in charge of this congregation had taken another post several months earlier, leaving lay people to lead services. The person with whom I spoke on the phone assumed I would be happy to conduct the service, which I was.

So, I set about collecting what was needed for Holy Communion from a side room (the vestry) and setting up the Communion Table. Within 10 minutes the service began on time. Of course, I gave the sermon as well.

Afterwards, I discovered that many in the congregation were English-speaking people from various embassies. All were very gracious and thanked me for being there and for preaching.

Fast forward the clock to a few weeks ago. At the church where I am the rector, a guest preacher was set – at least in my mind -- to give the sermon at both the early and later service. As time for the first service approached, no preacher. The only thing I could do was to begin and when the time came for the sermon to go to the pulpit. Fortunately, the appointed readings were familiar and powerful. In a sense, they ‘preached’ themselves. As it turned out, the visiting preacher had forgotten that there was an early service.

The motto of the Boy Scouts – be prepared -- is appropriate one for those in the ordained ministry. After all, one never knows when one will be called upon to give a good word about Jesus, to declare the Gospel, to call men and women to repentance and faith.

But, if you think about it, this is not *just* the calling of the Christian minister but of all Christians. All who have passed through the waters of baptism and been marked as Christ’s own need to have something meaningful to say about the Saviour.

Opportunities for sharing the Gospel often happen when least expected. Indeed, they happen in many different venues, including on an elevator, in a laundromat, at the grocery store. These opportunities come wherever people are found. Opportunities, however, are not enough.

A former Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church used to say, “You can’t share what you don’t know.” How true! Therefore, all who name Christ’s name should spend time in the scriptures, attend Christian education classes, read books by trusted theologians and be faithful at services of public worship.

What about you? Are you ready when people ask? You may not be a trained apologist or an ordained minister, but you have a role to play in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Be prepared.

*DIRECT us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain*

*everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our  
Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)*

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