

Do What You Have To Do
I Peter 4:8-11
Colebrook Congregational Church
May 3, 2015 – First Responder Sunday

Last Monday, I searched the database at Barnes & Noble looking for a picture book for the children's message, expecting *The Fire Cat*, or something with a dalmation, but instead the only picture book I could find was *Rhinos Who Rescue*. Why rhinos, I wondered. As I mentioned the book a couple days later to a friend, I remembered an old South African movie called, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. It has a complicated plot, but I remembered one of the running jokes: Every night, when the protagonists sat around a fire in the Kalahari, they would get distracted, and a rhino would run into their camp, stamp out the fire, and run back out. The narrator stated that the rhino is the desert's firefighters. Now it made sense.

The First Letter of Peter is from Peter in Rome addressed to the Christians in the area of Asia Minor. Paul's ministry there was during the 60s, and the author refers to Rome as “Babylon,” which Judeo-Christians don't do until after the Romans destroyed the Temple in the 70s. On the other hand there is no sense of the intense persecution and martyrdoms that started in the 90s, so it was probably written between those times.

The purpose of the Letter was to fortify the gentile converts to Christianity, who were being rejected by their friends and families. Greco-Roman culture was hierarchical and suspicious of foreign religions, believing they would cause immorality, insubordination in the household, sedition against the state, and cause women & slaves to misbehave. To counter this, Peter emphasizes that we should imitate Christ, by doing good and not retaliating against those who slander their community.

The chapter the selection comes from starts and ends with the reminder that Jesus suffered, so they should be able to withstand a bit of suffering. Peter also reminds them to stand strong in face of temptations, and they will be rewarded.

Today's verses are about how we should be in our community. Love one another. Be hospitable. Serve others. Use your God-given gifts. And be

strong.

God gives us gifts. All of us. We have to find them, open them, and we must use them. And we do so with all our strength, with God's help.

I do not have any personal experiences of firefighting to illustrate this selection. I remember wanting to be one back in middle school, so when at a Boy Scout event at the Torrington Armory, where the Torrington firefighters were allowing kids to try on their gear, I jumped at the chance. When I tried on the mask, I had a little panic attack. I knew then that God did not gift me with what was needed to be a firefighter. The closest I've ever been to firefighting, was through photography. One of these photos was from a winter night in Worcester. A nearby triple decker house was on fire, and I watched two firefighters on the roof cutting holes, and they were backlit by smoke that reflected light from the fire on the other side of the house. The people around me, and I, marveled at how those guys moved around. It did not look safe, but they did what had to do, using their gifts and their strength.

As I continued through Scouting, I discovered that God had gifted me with a near photographic memory and an ability to teach. So I used those gifts as a Troop Guide, teaching new Scouts many skills, including first aid. As an adult, I taught First Aid and Emergency Preparedness merit badges at Camp Workcoeman. I told my classes that if they did well on the test, then they could use their last day to do a simulated search & rescue in the woods. I remember one week, the commissioner sent me the largest CIT to be the victim. Apparently, he was being punished. I was partnered with a Scouter from the Czech Republic. I told him to hide the victim and gave him some ketchup packets. He insisted on bringing mustard, mayo, and peanut butter from the mess hall as well. He wanted to use his gifts to make the wounds look as realistic as possible. Now, you need to understand, that CIT was twice the size of any of my students. They had all the right equipment and training, but the spars broke, the blankets ripped, and the victim was dropped down a gorge...twice. It was their first time, but they had that drive to serve others, and they would get more practice and grow bigger and stronger over time.

No matter how you are gifted and how much you prepare, putting your gifts into practice in real life is quite a different thing. Serving as a Chaplain at Hartford Hospital, I watched the speed and efficiency of the medics and the flight paramedics in the Emergency Department, seeing how they used their gifts to help save lives.

Recently those gifts I discovered and practiced in Scouts were used in real life. One night, after leaving Barnes & Noble, heading west on 202 past the Nepaug Reservoir, my co-workers, and I, and other mall employees were moments behind an accident. It was a foggy night after an electrical storm, where a bunch of horses had been spooked and they jumped their fence. One of the girls from Old Navy glanced off a Paint and an eastbound SUV collided with a Morgan. There were three of us from B&N right behind them. One just turned around and drove off. The other guy, Bubba, and I decided to go see if we could help. It was a bit chaotic, a half dozen people were in hysterics, and one guy was bleeding from his head. Bubba turned to me and asked if I knew first aid, because he didn't. I went and got my first aid kit and handled the bleeding man, while Bubba calmed everyone else. Bubba has a gift of calm, and he somehow has a calming affect on people. Soon enough, a paramedic arrived and took over, and then I noticed that the Paint was up in a snow drift. I figured it wouldn't be good if he ran off again, so Bubba & stared at him. Bubba bravely decided to stay and talk to the girls some more, so I climbed up the drift and I remembered something I heard my stepfather say about horses, so I was able to keep him from running off until his owner arrived. Both Bubba and I had gifts that were useful in that situation, though they were different gifts, and we used them to help serve others.

We all have gifts, given to us by God, and we shouldn't squander them. We must use them, in serving and in loving our neighbors. First Responders use their gifts on every call, serving our community, risking their own safety in the process. I ask that any First Responder here, past or present, please stand and be recognized and thanked for using their gifts to serve us.

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Holy and Gracious God, we give thanks to all those who serve our community, keeping us safe in our times of need. We give thanks that you have given them the gifts necessary to protect us, and have moved them to lives of service. Our gratitude for them knows no bounds. We also give you thanks for family, friends, life, & loved ones; and for all the blessings you have bestowed upon us. Giving God, your desire for us leads the way, may we have the ears to hear the cries of this world, responding with our gifts to enact Your hope. Compassionate One, fill us with your love that we may see deeply into all the needs around us. Help us to care with Your heart. We ask that you remember those who we hold in our hearts.

May Your love, Your grace, Your compassion, Your mercy, carry us away, this day and lead us with love to be Your hands and heart in the world.

Amen.

I Peter 4:8-11

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.