



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

First Communion and Mother's Day

May 10, 2026; Easter 6A: [Acts 17:22-31](#); [1 Peter 3:13-22](#); [John 14:15-21](#)

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Peter 3:15)

I have just returned from a week away at the annual training for Episcopal military chaplains. This conference included Episcopal priests serving in the VA, in Federal Prisons, and in all branches of the military all over the world, from as far away as Okinowawa, Korea, and other places that could not be named. Lunch time conversations with the chaplains included sharing personal journeys and chatting about kids while trying to figure out how to adapt Prayer Book funeral services for mass casualties and wondering with everything going on if it was time to retire. It's an incredibly difficult time for our military chaplains. While some have decided to stay to get out of the service, most are staying, in order to offer an alternative to the dominant Christian perspective and support the soldiers and sailors in their care. Not one but four bishops encouraged us to continue, drawing strength from our roots, the traditions of our faith, and the power of our God. A research psychiatrist from Duke and a professor from Virginia seminary covered topics such as moral injury and trauma, combatting Christian nationalism, and digging into a life of prayer. Despite some heavy discussions, the overall feeling was joy. We were continually in the chapel, praying and singing. We renewed our ordination vows, ordained three new chaplains, went on long walks in the woods, and stayed up far too late talking and laughing and telling stories. In it all we renewed connection with one another, with God, with what God was calling us to be and with what God was calling us to do. In our second reading, Peter says, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” That's quite a command. Can you provide an accounting for the hope that is in you? Like the Athenians, we live in a profoundly religious culture that forgets – or gets profoundly confused about– what god it is worshipping. Like Paul, we can give that God a name. Like Peter, we can proclaim that the hope that is in us comes from the story, the power, and the presence of Jesus Christ.

This morning we are celebrating the First Communion of Everett, Allegra, Hugo, Laird, and Robin. Theologically, a celebration of first communion isn't needed. Newborns can receive communion as soon as they are baptized. We even have a little spoon just for this purpose! The tradition of first communion classes came out of the idea that kids need to understand what's going on. The secret is that they already do, probably far more than you or me. Our first communion kids are comfortable with a little mystery. They enjoy questions. They have great spiritual imaginations and are fully open to the idea of God at work in their lives and the world around them. They have figured it out. They know that Jesus is in the bread and wine and that Jesus is also in them. They know that in the sacrament they become part of his body. They know that in communion they are fed so they can feed and be in communion with others. They might not have all the answers in their heads but they know the presence of God in their hearts. We should learn from them, not the other way around.

This is the last Gospel reading before the Feast of the Ascension, the 40th day after Easter when Jesus goes up to heaven. Jesus tells the disciples that he will not leave them alone but that he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them. In the meantime, their job is to follow his commandments. Notice that he says *his* commandments, not "the commandments." So what are Jesus' commandments? This morning's gospel is from the 14th chapter of John. The 13th chapter of John tells the story of the last supper, after which Jesus washes the disciples' feet and gives them the commandment to love one another. (John 13:34) Want to know what communion with God and one another is all about? Want to explain the hope that is in all of us? The answer is simple: It's all about love.

Today is Mother's Day. I want to tell you a little about my mother. She died about 40 years ago but she lives on in my memories, my life, and my ministry. My mom would take all five of her kids to church, keeping us out of her hair by having us sing in the choir, acolyte, and all that. She sang in the choir herself, served on the vestry, and volunteered in the church and the community. Most of all, she lived out her faith through her career as a physical therapist, spending a lifetime visiting people in their homes, focusing much of her time on young paraplegics and quadriplegics. She started a foundation that went on to build the first ever home of its kind for physically challenged and mentally alert young adults outside of Chicago -- a building which now bears her name. Like my fellow chaplains, she had a ministry of presence, which helped people experience the presence of God. Her love for her kids -- and her love for others -- planted the seeds of ministry and made me much of who I am today. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence." In so many ways, my mother did that. This morning we give thanks for our mothers -- or those who mothered us. As we celebrate them, may we strive to follow their examples and do what they did. I think they would be proud.