On the show *Parks and Recreation* there was an episode that featured a cult who followed a volcano mouthed 28-foot tall lizard named Zorp the Surveyor. Every year they believed that Zorp would be destroying the world so they would gather in a park to await for the coming destruction playing flutes and staying up all night. Having grown up in California this is all pretty routine stuff. The funny part about it was that in an effort to not be thought of as weirdos they named their cult The Reasonablists – because you don’t want to be anti-reason do you? It’s the same thing that the scientologists did by making opposition to them seem anti-science. And this naturally enough gets us to us to Paul and his First Letter to the Thessalonians where he says, “For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.” I have never been in a cult, but I have known some people who went to Texas A&M. The thing is from what I have read about cults they always keep the weird stuff from you until you have gone so far in that it is really hard to turn back. Cults try to give you a very safe and reasonable entry before they tell you that all the secrets of the universe have been coded into Kiss’s 1976 hit, “Detroit Rock City.” But that is not what we Christians do and that is what Paul is trying to tell those in Thessalonica that he did not do. He is explaining that he and his fellow travelers simply passed on what they knew and believed. They did not sugar coat it, nor leave out anything that might seem a little strange. But honestly when you claim the God of the Universe was crucified on a hill outside of Jerusalem its pretty hard thing to do anyway. Paul is telling us that when we spread the Gospel message we are not asked to make a sale or close the deal we are only asked to be honest. We are asked to simply explain what it is we believe and why we believe it. We don’t need to leave anything out nor do we need to dress anything up.

Some of you may have heard my interview with Fr. Andrew Grosso the other day. In this interview we got onto the subject of apologetics, that is explanations of the Christian faith. I asked him if he thought that apologetics as a pursuit was worthwhile. His answer was basically yes and no. No if we see apologetics as a way to argue someone into the faith, but yes if they are explanations of what we believe and why we believe it. I think this is a worthwhile distinction largely because one is about us and the other is about God. If we are looking to argue someone into the faith the focus becomes about us and about our ability to make the sale or close the deal. If however we are simply explaining our faith we are putting the focus on God. We are explaining who he is and what has been done in the person of Jesus Christ. And while certainly we would be happy if this or that person converted we are leaving that part up to God. We are just doing what God has asked of us – preaching the Gospel to all nations.

Sadly I have known and I am sure some of you have known people who had a bad experience with Christianity. Perhaps they went to a church with a strong charismatic leader who had a scandal or they were taught a bad theology like the prosperity Gospel that went down easy but was ultimately found lacking. Bad experiences with Christianity almost always come when someone decides God needs help in making the sale. Well the fact of the matter is that God does not need help in any of it, but rather he asks us, out of love, to share the hope that is found in us. We don’t need to make stuff up or pretend that certain hard things are not there. We just need to pass on the message. So the nice part is this relives us of the burden of having to make the conversion, but the harder part is it does not relive us of the call to share our faith. And I know this might sound an even more frightening proposition to Episcopalians, but that is what God asks. He asks us not to use deceit nor trickery but to preach Christ and Christ crucified to all who need to hear it this day and forevermore.