Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 22, 2018

Acts 4:1-12 (esp. v. 10-12)

Rev. Micah Bauer

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our sermon text for this morning is from Acts 4: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Thus far the text.

## Retelling the story

The Book of Acts tells us about the very first Christians—Jesus’ apostles and those who believed their message. It tells us of the very early Church, with its struggles and its proclamation.

For early Christians, the most important thing in the world was that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. The apostles were witnesses of the risen Christ: they had known him during his earthly life, they had watched him die and be buried, and they had met with him multiple times after he had risen from the dead. They were witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection—they saw the risen Christ, and they testified that this is what actually happened.

When people heard and believed this message, it changed their lives forever. If Jesus is risen from the dead, and if he’s coming back soon, then I really don’t have to worry about my retirement; I can sell everything I have and live in community with other believers (Acts 2). Jesus may be risen from the dead, but he is not absent; just as Jesus himself worked miracles and healed the blind, the deaf, and the mute, so, too, did he give this power to his apostles. In Jesus’ name, Peter grabs a lame man by the arm, and lifts him up, and all of a sudden he’s leaping around like a child, overjoyed that his legs work again (Acts 3).

When Peter heals this lame man, everyone is astonished, and they turn to him for an explanation. Peter rightly says that it is by the power of Jesus of Nazareth—whom you killed, whom God raised from the dead—it is by this Jesus that this man is able to walk. Repent, and be forgiven.

But just as *Jesus* encountered resistance when *he* preached the Gospel, so, too, do his apostles. Some people received this message gladly. Others did not. The people in charge—the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees—they seize Peter and John, and they throw them in jail. The next day they bring them before the council to give an explanation for their supposed heresy—for saying that Jesus rose from the dead, a preposterous proposition.

## What makes the apostles’ works good

The rulers ask the question, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” They know something’s up. It’s clear that something remarkable has happened. It’s not every day that people are healed instantly like this, much less that people talk about someone rising from the dead—getting up and walking out of his tomb—that just doesn’t happen. What is this all about, and is it by good powers or evil ones that these men heal bones and speak nonsense?

Peter answers that it is a *good* deed that they have done, healing the crippled man. It is good because it was done “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” It was a good deed because it was a *godly* deed, done through Jesus, God’s servant. They had rejected Jesus, but God vindicated him by raising him from the dead. This risen Jesus had given these powers to his apostles, so that they might do good works and bear witness to him.

## Salvation

And what’s more, “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” “Salvation,” “saved…” this is how Peter described what he did to the lame man: he saved him by Jesus’ name.

Peter equates salvation with healing the man’s broken legs—this physical change. We usually think of “salvation” as something spiritual, but this, too, is actually a biblical way of speaking. In the Exodus, God *saved* his people from the hand of Pharaoh; he led them physically out of one land and into another. Not long afterward, God *saved* his people by raising up judges to defeat their enemies like the Philistines.

Now, these physical acts certainly had spiritual implications. When God brought his people out of Egypt, he led them into the Promised Land; he kept his promise to Abraham and ensured that this group of people, the Israelites, were the people of the promise. When God saved his people through the judges, he healed his relationship with them; he forgave their sins and gave them a fresh start. Salvation is both physical and spiritual—it is holistic, because we humans are both physical and spiritual. We are not just souls, but bodies, as well. It is unnatural that when we die, we are ripped apart—our souls going to heaven while our bodies go into the ground. But when Jesus comes back down from heaven, he will save us once and for all. He will reunite us, body and soul, and welcome us into eternal life in his new creation. Jesus saves us thoroughly and holistically. He saves the whole of us, not just our soul, but our body, too.

## Salvation in Jesus alone

We can find this salvation nowhere else but in Jesus. There truly is “no other name… by which we must be saved.” The Jews thought they had God. After all, the God of the Old Testament—our God—was their God. They had God’s promises through Abraham and Moses. They had the Promised Land… sort of. They had the temple… sort of. God was on their side, and he kept his promises to them. The Jews truly were his people. But when God sent his Son into the world, many of his people the Jews rejected him. In doing so, they rejected God himself. The Jews thought they had God—and for a time, they did—but they rejected his Son and so they no longer had God.

So it is with everyone who rejects Jesus today. They think they have God already, but they are wrong. There was an interesting dissertation written about being wrong. It focuses on this question: “What does it feel like to be wrong?” Most people will respond that it feels shameful, or guilty. But they’re wrong. That’s what it feels like to be *proven* wrong. Actually *being* wrong feels exactly like being right. Whether you’re *actually* right or wrong, you’re usually convinced that you’re right. The Jews who rejected Jesus thought they had God, but they were wrong. People today assume that God must be on their side, because *why not*? They, too, are wrong, even though it feels like they’re right.

The truth is that there is no salvation outside of Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. If you have seen him, you have seen the Father. Jesus and the Father are one. And so, to reject Jesus is to reject the one true God.

Why is it that there is no other way to be saved than by trusting that Christ’s death and resurrection are your death and resurrection? Because otherwise we can have no part with him. Because there is only One who lays down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd must lay down his life, or the sheep will remain scattered and be devoured. This is how Jesus has saved us, and it was necessary for him to do so.

There is no God without Jesus. There is no Jesus whose purpose is not to head to the cross to save us. There is no empty tomb without a corpse on the cross—no Easter without Lent and Good Friday. There is no Good Shepherd, save the One who lays down his life for the sheep. There is no salvation—no good person, no one saved from his inevitable death—apart from Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

## Your salvation in Jesus

Dear friends in Christ, this salvation is yours. Jesus has gone to the cross, for you. Jesus has risen from the dead, for you. Jesus will come back soon, for you. He does all this to save you, and save you he has. He is your way, your truth, and your life. There is no salvation outside of him, but you have salvation in him.

Jesus saves you holistically—your entire person, body and soul. We get glimpses of this now and then in this life, but it will be fully true when Jesus comes back. On That Day, even death itself will loose its grip and die. Jesus saves you from evil—Satan no longer commands your life, and hell is no longer your rightful destination. You are no longer bound to sin, for you are endowed with the Spirit of Christ. You have the fullness of God dwelling within you, body and soul.

You are God’s chosen, saved people. You even have the name of Jesus of Nazareth written on you, for you were marked with his name in your baptism. There is no salvation outside of Jesus, but you *are* “in Christ.” In the name of Jesus, amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.