

## “By No Other Name”

Acts 4: 5-14

Easter 3B, Boise, 2021

The Gospel the deacon just read gives us the Lucan version of the risen Christ's first appearance to a gathering of the male disciples on the night following the Resurrection. The Gospel for last Sunday gave the Johannine account of the same. Jesus assures them that He is not just a spirit. He invites them to touch Him, and then, according to St Luke, He eats some fish with them. Then He demonstrates from the Jewish Scriptures, our OT, that the Messiah's suffering, death, and Resurrection were all prophesied beforehand; and also that because of those events “repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His Name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

In our readings from The Acts of the Apostles this Eastertide, we are at the beginning of that proclamation. We are in Jerusalem and the towns of Judea, where St Peter and the other Apostles are preaching to Jews. Today we find Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, speaking truth to power. It is the same council that condemned Jesus to death and turned Him over to Pilate, the Roman governor of the region. The men who sit on it are not pleased with Peter's preaching on the Temple Mount that Jesus is now risen from the dead and reigning at God's right hand and destined to return. But Peter and John have healed the lame man begging by the gate called Beautiful. A crowd witnessed it and are now praising God for the miracle. Perhaps it is Caiaphas, the high priest presiding over the council, who asks them, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

Well, it is exactly the question Peter wants them to ask. He now has a chance to preach the Gospel to the heart of the Jewish establishment — the high priest and his father-in-law, Annas; others in the party of the Sadducees and some in that of the Pharisees. Among the seventy who sit on the Sanhedrim,

Peter knows he had a couple of friends who already believe in Christ's Resurrection — Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. What a marvelous opportunity to persuade the leaders of the nation that Jesus of Nazareth is the One, David's Heir, who will return in Person to assume the rule of God's Kingdom and extend it over the whole earth! Peter does not consider those who steered the Passover mob to demand Jesus' death to be hopelessly damned. Forgiveness is extended to any who will repent, no matter what part he played in that heinous deed, even Caiaphas.

Just think of the possibilities if the high priest and his ilk accept the Gospel. The rest of the nation will follow, not just the Jews in Roman Palestine but those in the Diaspora also, spread throughout the Roman and Persian Empires. When the Messiah returns to take His place on David's Throne, "kings will come to the brightness of [Israel's] rising" [Isa 60: 3]. God's Chosen People will be "a light to lighten the Gentiles" [Lk 2: 32], and men and women from afar will make pilgrimages to Jerusalem bearing gifts. Even the remotest isles will accept the Messiah's rule, live by God's Law, and finally have justice. The strong will no longer oppress the weak.

All that can follow, if the gentlemen of the Sanhedrin will accept the Good News. — So St Peter gives it his best shot. He does what worked in his two speeches to the multitude, accusing them of having murdered the Messiah and then asking them to repent and receive forgiveness. "You want to know by what means the lame man was healed?" "By the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified." God raised Him from the dead. He was the stone, spoken of in the Psalm [118], "whom you the builders rejected, but now has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other Name under Heaven . . . by which we can be saved."

Great sermon! But, by God's will, only a remnant of Israel becomes the nucleus of the new worldwide Church. As in the previous apostasies recorded in

Scripture, most in the nation fall away into denial and unbelief. Caiaphas and his party do not accept the Gospel, and the whole nation does not follow. Only a remnant does.

And now, if you'll permit, I will pull us out of the first century, and describe a difficulty that Christ's followers face in our own time in speaking the *euanggelion*, the good message, to others. St Peter and the Holy Apostles had audiences that were looking for truth. Outside of the Church, we meet many, especially among the young, who deny that it exists. Or rather I should say they believe that each person has a right to his or her own truth, and that it is impolite of others not to acknowledge it — if not downright offensive. But St Peter says regarding Jesus Christ, "There is no other Name under Heaven . . . by which we can be saved."

The claim follows logically from the other claims Peter made in his preaching. Jesus, David's descendant, is the One anointed with the Spirit by the God who made Heaven and earth. There are not many gods, and there are not many sons of God whom He anointed. No, just one God and one Anointed, who are not multiplied by anyone's wishes. As the anointed descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham and thus a member of the Chosen Nation, Christ is the Person in whom the one, true God fulfilled the promise made in the Covenant with Abraham to bring a blessing on all mankind through his Seed. It is Christ in whom that promise is fulfilled, not Moses, not Peter or Paul, not the archangel Gabriel, or anyone else. But, in accordance with God's plan, that blessing offered to all comes to us by a single Person, Christ Jesus.

In the events we have just witnessed, Peter says to his fellow Jews, we have now learned the means of that blessing, and the means are as follows: You men here that I am speaking to unjustly arranged for His death, and by that death He atoned for your sins and for mine. He bore the guilt and took the punishment for all the sins committed from Adam and Eve to the last man or woman to be born, including your sin of putting Him to death. Then He rose again to give us all the

Spirit and eternal life. Now repent of what you did and acknowledge the Name of the Saviour, the only Name “by which we can be saved”; for there is no other.

Caiaphas the high priest would not make such an acknowledgment, but, as I said, we know of at least two on the Sanhedrin who did. It is not easy to confess murder, but is it any easier to kill postmodernist pride (?) — to give up the fantasy that truth is a purely subjective thing, and that hence no one’s truth is more valid than another’s? To say that, in our attempts to figure out reality, “everyone gets a trophy” may seem an easy solution for achieving social harmony and preventing fights, but we know it isn’t true. Reality is not ours to define. If we don’t align ourselves with what truly is real, we get clobbered by it. Only those who get it right end with a trophy, the trophy of living a good life.

So it is in our interest, to take seriously St Peter’s claim and decide whether it is true — not to dismiss it merely because it is exclusivist. Two plus two equals four. That mathematical truth has not changed over time, and it is as true on Mars as it is on earth. It is not so easy to prove that Jesus is God’s Son, who died for our sins and ended mankind’s alienation from its Creator, or that He rose from the dead to give us new life. Christians live by faith and hope. But the first thing to get across to people today, especially the young, is the nature of the claims that the Apostles made. They claimed that the matters about which they spoke were objectively real and universally true. And because such matters pertain to salvation, our rescue from eventual oblivion or worse, there is much riding on those claims about them.

So let me recount them one last time in my sermon. We are here today because God made the world and put us in it. But by ignoring what the Creator wants from us, we have rebelled against Him, going contrary to His will. He sent His Son to bring us back, to reconcile us to Himself, who became incarnate as the Messiah of Israel, the nation through which such reconciliation was to come. The unjust death of the Son was the means for erasing the guilt of all sins against

Him and His Father and our injustices to others, and also for eventually putting an end to them. His Resurrection is God's confirmation of that, as well as the means for incorporating us in the new, Spirit-filled humanity that His disciples witnessed in its appearances. And, as Jews always believed about the Messiah, Jesus will come visibly to us at the end of history, establish His universal rule, and give the nations justice, never to be denied to anyone thereafter.

Those claims are true, or they are false. I myself have made my decision.

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