

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Acts 4:8-12
No Other Name

Dear Friends in Christ,

What is $2 + 3$? Many of us will just know the answer from memory. $2 + 3 = 5$. But there are other ways to figure this out. Maybe someone knows their doubles really well. $2 + 2 = 4$ and there is 1 left over to add to 4 so the answer is 5. Or you could count on your fingers. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. While there is a debate over what method is best to use, each of these methods results in the same answer even though someone can arrive at the answer in different ways.

Or consider a clogged sink. There are several ways to unclog the drain. One person might dump chemicals down the drain to dissolve the clog. Another person might use a plunger to break up the clog. An adventurous person may disconnect the pipes and find the clog to remove it. Someone else might run a snake tool down the drain to break through the clog. Again, a plumber may have a strong opinion on the best method to use. However, each of these methods can unclog the drain.

In a similar way, if someone wants to be saved from suffering forever in the fires of hell, there are many methods to use. Take your pick from Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and more world religions. Pray to Allah, Baal, a golden calf, your ancestors or Jesus. Give to the poor, make pilgrimages, deny yourself worldly pleasure, be kind to others. These are all ways to avoid eternal suffering and receive a good life in paradise after death. Many today will claim that religious beliefs and practices are like math and plumbing problems. There are different ways to achieve the correct result. Peter disagrees. Peter, by inspiration of God, the Holy Spirit, says that there is no other name than Jesus when it comes to being saved. No other name saves like Jesus does. Therefore, we hold to the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:8–12 (NIV84)

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

The Name of Jesus Saves

This event happened shortly after Pentecost which was 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. So the resurrection and the amazing events of Pentecost are still fresh in the hearts and minds of the disciples and the people of Jerusalem. Peter and John healed a crippled man and were put into jail for the night because they were talking about Jesus. The next day, they are brought before a group of powerful Jewish leaders. Annas, Caiaphas and others gathered to question Peter and John. Sound familiar? About two months earlier, Jesus was on trial before Annas and Caiaphas. How did that turn out for Jesus? Maybe it would be prudent for Peter to comply with the high priest and not speak so openly about Jesus. That would only make the leaders angry.

But when the leaders asked, “*By what power or what name did you do this?*” Peter answered boldly with the truth. *It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*

This was not a timid answer. Remember the sign Pilate had made for the cross of Christ? Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. By the words Peter chose by inspiration of the Spirit, he points the Jewish leaders to their sin of crucifying Christ. And then he just says it plainly.

Whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. Peter will not allow the leaders to scare him into silence. Peter will not compromise the truth of Christ’s resurrection in order to protect himself from execution. And Peter won’t stop. He makes sure the leaders understand that Jesus is the Messiah.

He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ This is a quote from Psalm 118, which is why we have Psalm 118 for our service today. During Holy Week, Jesus told the parable of the talents and quoted the same section of Psalm 118. He was telling the Jewish leaders that they were going to kill him and thereby reject the most important part of God’s temple, the Christ. Of course, that is exactly what happened. Now Peter reminds them that Jesus quoted this Psalm to them and that they killed him anyway.

It is really harsh law that Peter proclaims to the most powerful Jews in Jerusalem. Peter did so because there is no other name that would save them. Unless they repented and believed in the name of Jesus, they would be lost forever. Therefore, at great personal risk, Peter proclaimed the name of Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior to them.

I am speaking today to a much more friendly group. Yet every person I see and all who are watching and listening today have a little Annas and Caiaphas in them. The person in my mirror does too. Our sinful nature has rejected the name of Jesus and will continue to reject and persecute Jesus all of our earthly life. As believers, we have a choice to make each day and maybe even each hour and each minute. Am I going to live this day as though Jesus saved me by dying to forgive all my sins and rising to give me the certain hope of eternal life? Or am I going to live this day as if Jesus is not that important? If we live a day without Jesus at the center, aren’t we denying his resurrection in the same way as Annas and Caiaphas?

Just two chapters later, Luke records that “a large number of priest” came to believe in the name of Jesus. Amazing! Those who rejected him, killed him and persecuted his disciples now believe in Jesus. They were forgiven and saved by the name of Jesus. When we have times of rejecting Jesus from parts of our lives or times in our lives, know that his name still saves. His suffering and death still covers all our sins. Jesus has still been raised from the dead so we know he will bring us to eternal life with him. Jesus holds onto us. Therefore hold to his name throughout this life.

Hold to the Name of Jesus

On this day in history, exactly 500 years ago, a young Christian stood before the most powerful political figure of his time. The international meeting discussing political alliances and how to defend Europe from the Islamic invasions was called the Diet of Worms. These important talks took a brief break to deal with a German monk named Martin Luther. The Emperor’s spokesman asked Luther to recant all of his writings. On April 18, 1521, Luther stood firm on the Word of Christ and would not recant. He said, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning – and my

conscience is captive to the Word of God – then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.” (Kittleson, *Luther the Reformer*, 161).

We who are believers follow in the way of Peter and of Luther. They stood firm on Christ and would not move from the Scriptures. They spoke truth to power and would not bow to pressure and threats of death from the most powerful men in their times. It seems glamorous and brave and heroic. The little guy takes on the powerful and wins! But Peter and Luther did not set out to overthrow rulers or start revolutions. First and foremost, they were captive to the Word of God. The name of Jesus is the one and only name that saves. How could they endanger their own eternal souls by rejecting the only Savior?

In addition, Peter and Luther did not hate those in power or opposed to them. They wanted even their enemies to trust in Christ and be saved. Peter used every opportunity to proclaim the saving name of Christ to the Jewish leaders. Some eventually repented and believed and were saved. Others continued to oppose the believers. But Peter would not give the enemies of Christ anything to use against him except the message of Christ crucified and risen. Notice how Peter begins his defense: *Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple.*

The high priest and others would simply look foolish in front of the other Jews if they punished Peter and John for helping a crippled man. The only reason the Jewish leaders could hate Peter and John was because of the message they proclaimed about Jesus. There is a lesson here for us about how we stand firm on the name of Christ.

We do so while showing kindness. We show kindness while standing firm on God’s Word. This has always been important but is becoming even more important as society becomes less and less Christian. Based on the Word of Christ, we are opposed to abortion. It is a terrible evil in this world. Based on that stance, many in our world will come to the conclusion that we hate women. We rightly take a stand against the LGBTQ movement. Scripture is clear that God made humans male and female and marriage is one man and one woman united for life. And society comes to the conclusion that we hate anyone in one of the LGBTQ categories. Our Scripture for today clearly teaches that Jesus is the only Savior. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and all others who reject the name of Jesus as their Savior will not be saved. And the world concludes that we hate everyone who is not a Christian.

If there is hate in our hearts for someone, ask the only one who can save us to forgive us. And we ask our Savior to help us show such kindness that no one can rightly accuse us of hatred. You see, it is easy for someone to read or hear what we believe and accuse us of hating others and being unloving. But if that person knows you and knows you to be a kind person, there is a bit of cognitive dissonance in their thinking. Show overwhelming kindness to the young woman who is pregnant without a husband. Show overwhelming kindness to the person struggling with gender identity. Show overwhelming kindness to the atheist you know. Don’t give them any reason to confirm their suspicions that you hate them. Peter wanted the high priest who arranged for the execution of Jesus to be saved. We also want everyone we know to be saved.

There is only one name that saves. We must stand on that truth. But Jesus was crucified for the sins of all people and rose to life on Easter for all people. So figure out math problems however you want. Thank the Lord that he has given us the one and only answer for eternal salvation – Jesus Christ, crucified and risen!

Amen.