

No Other Name

A sermon preached at Second Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the fourth Sunday of Easter, April 20, 1997.
Scripture Lessons: Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Last week Christians grieved with our Muslim brothers and sisters whose loved ones died in a tragic fire that swept through a tent in the holy city of Mecca. The Muslim pilgrims had journeyed to Mecca to worship Allah at the Kaaba, the holiest shrine in all of Islam. I asked two of my colleagues in ministry if they thought those pilgrims who had perished in the fire would perish everlastingly in the fires of hell. One of my colleagues answered thoughtfully and compassionately, "We can only commend them to the mercy of God." I wanted my colleagues to help me sort out my thinking about a troubling passage of Scripture I had been wrestling with in preparation for this sermon.

St. Peter proclaimed to the ~~Jewish~~ ^{in Jerusalem} religious and political rulers that salvation comes only through the name of Jesus Christ. Many Christians today feel extremely uncomfortable with these exclusive claims regarding salvation. We strongly resist or even deny these exclusive claims. One reason is because we know that some Christians have used these exclusive claims to justify the very worst kinds of religious atrocities and bigotry. Many main-line Christians find it morally offensive to deny salvation to Jews and Muslims, as well as those friendly, good hearted agnostics that live next door to us. And yet we can't read the Bible for very long without running again and again into exclusive claims that salvation comes only through Christ. In the next 15 minutes let's talk about how we can passionately affirm

with Peter that salvation is found only in Christ, without condemning to hell the vast majority of humankind which has never personally accepted Jesus.

One way to understand these exclusive claims is to listen carefully to the Word of God in Scripture. Our first Scripture lesson from Acts chapter four concludes a story that began in chapter 3. In chapter 3 we see Peter and John going up to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. A man who has been lame from birth is being carried into the temple precincts. People carry him there every day where he begs for money. The lame man sees Peter and John. He begs them to give him some money. Peter and John don't give him any money but they don't ignore him. Peter says to him, "I have no silver or gold to give you, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And Peter takes him by the hand and raises him up. He's healed. He begins jumping and walking and leaping and praising God. He draws the attention of all the people who've come up to the temple. Peter explains to the astonished crowd that the healing came from the risen Christ. By faith in Christ this lame man was ~~made~~ healed. Then Peter called the astonished crowd to change their minds about Jesus ^{whom they had crucified} and to turn to God and put their hope in Jesus. About 5000 people accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

The healing of the lame man drew the attention of the priests. They were annoyed that Peter and John were preaching about Jesus who had been crucified as a criminal just a few days before. They arrested Peter and John and threw them in prison. The next day the two apostles were brought to trial. The judge

asked Peter and John, "By what power or by what name did you heal this man?" Speaking in his own defense, Peter said to the religious rulers, "This man was healed in the power of and in the name of Jesus. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Now the key to understanding what Peter said is found in the meaning of the word salvation. The Greek word used for salvation means many things. It ^{can mean} means saving from condemnation before a court of law. It ^{can mean} means being delivered from an attack of an enemy. It ^{can mean} means being healed. ^{It can mean being saved from God's judgment} Salvation means all these things. Salvation has to do, not only with heaven, but with healing. So Peter is claiming that there's no physical healing, no acquittal in a court of law, no deliverance in battle, no salvation apart from Jesus Christ.

The lame man was healed through Christ. He was saved through Christ. And how is anyone healed or saved today? The Christian church boldly answers, "All salvation comes in the name of Christ."

Now think! There's a little boy in India who has been suffering from malaria. His parents have been so worried about his health. His life hangs in the balance. They call for a doctor and the doctor does all she can to heal the sick boy. But the boy's parents are also deeply religious so they call for a Hindu priest. The priest comes and chants a prayer in Sanskrit. Several days later the fever breaks. The boy awakes. He's perfectly well. His parents think the doctor and the priest

saved their boy. But the Christian church says, "Let it be made known that this little boy is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Christians believe that the Risen Christ is at work throughout the world healing people, delivering people, bringing salvation to them.

The job of the Christians is to name Christ as the source of all healing and deliverance and salvation. We do not condemn to hell all those who've never heard of Christ. Rather we proclaim that wherever salvation occurs the Risen Christ is its source. *The leper was healed by Christ, only men did he pray God & thank in no name of Christ.*

When we were little children many of us looked forward to Christmas and the gifts under the tree. Some of us sat on Santa's knee and recited a list of all the toys we wanted for Christmas. We slept fitfully on Christmas Eve and woke early on Christmas morning to find many of the gifts that Santa left us. But as we grew older we discovered that the real source of those gifts was our parents. With love and appreciation we began to think of the sacrifices and the hard work that made our gifts possible. As adults it would be a great folly at best and sinful ingratitude at worst to continue to attribute our gifts to Santa. *The salvation by Christ is something like that.*

A Christian names Christ as the source of every good gift. Christians have hope that the good gift of salvation is enjoyed far beyond the boundaries of the Christian church. "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea." One of the primary jobs of Christians is to bear witness that every good gift comes down to us from the God revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when our hearts are in tune with the Lord Jesus Christ our greatest joy is experienced when a

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person acknowledges Jesus Christ as the source of all the good things in their life ^{as well as} ~~and~~ the source of their eternal salvation.

So what about those Muslims that perished in the fire in Mecca? We commend them to the mercy of Christ who said, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also (into eternal life)."

Let us pray: