

Sermon for November 26, 2017 - Reformation 500 (Christ the King Sunday)

Acts 4:1-12 (EHV)

Theme: Christ Alone

- 1) A message the world hates.
- 2) The only message that saves.

*<sup>1</sup> As Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees approached them. <sup>2</sup> They were very upset because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead in connection with Jesus. <sup>3</sup> They arrested them and put them in jail until the next day because it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> But many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men increased to about five thousand. <sup>5</sup> The next day, the rulers, the elders, and the experts in the law assembled in Jerusalem <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the rest of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, <sup>9</sup> if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."*

Ever since the fall into sin, all people have been plagued by the question: How can I be at peace with God?

Throughout time, people have tried to answer this question in predominately two different ways. On the one hand you have a minority of people like atheists, agnostics or the Sadducees in our text, who convince themselves that they don't have to worry about the question because there probably isn't any god or afterlife to worry about anyway. The vast majority of people and world religions, however, do believe in God and an afterlife. They hope to please God by doing more good than bad or offering great sacrifices – thereby earning God's favor.

As we will learn today: neither answer is true. Yes, there most certainly is a God and an existence beyond the grave, but we can't secure our peace with God by either ignoring him or earning his favor. God's Word is clear: there is only one way to be at peace with the LORD. What is it? It's through faith in Jesus and Jesus alone. Let us consider these things under the theme: **Christ Alone.**  
.. 1) A message the world hates. 2)The only message that saves.

Part One: A Message the World Hates

The events surrounding our sermon text probably took place only a couple weeks after Pentecost. Jesus' crucifixion was still fresh in everyone's mind. Being a follower of Jesus was, therefore, a scary proposition.

Right before our text, Peter and John healed a man in the name of Jesus. The people saw it and were impressed. Even more impressive, however, was the message Peter preached after the healing: that the Jesus the Jews crucified is the Messiah prophesied about in Holy Scripture. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him all authority in heaven and earth. He did this so that, whoever repents of his sins and turns to Jesus in faith might be forgiven.

Yes, quite a crowd gathered to hear Peter's preaching – and the priests didn't like it. We read: <sup>1</sup> *As Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees approached them.* <sup>2</sup> *They were very upset because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead in connection with Jesus.*

In order to understand these first few verses of our text, we need to talk about the Sadducees. They were a small, but very influential sect in Judaism – especially since they occupied the upper ranks of the priesthood. The Sadducees were exceedingly “liberal” in their theology denying much of what the Old Testament Scriptures taught. In fact, the only books they did recognize were the 5 books Moses wrote. They rejected the rest. The Sadducees did not believe in the existence of angels, an afterlife in heaven or hell, or a resurrection from the dead. For them, life was all about the here and now – thereby giving them the false hope that they don't have to worry about hell when they died. They could live however they wanted – with only the earthly consequences of sin to worry about. Like many people today, the Sadducees performed all the religious rituals their culture dictated, but it was all a façade - more or less a show for traditions sake. They were more concerned with politics and earthly things than the message that truly saves a person's soul.

You can see, then, why the Sadducees would be “upset” that Peter and John were teaching the resurrection in connection with Jesus – whom they had just crucified as a blasphemer. Peter's preaching proclaimed their guilt. It undermined their doctrine and authority.

Our text continues: <sup>3</sup> *They arrested them and put them in jail until the next day because it was already evening.* The Jewish leaders were doing what they could to prevent the Gospel from spreading, but it was too little, too late. The LORD himself made sure of that, as we read: <sup>4</sup> *But many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men increased to about five thousand.*

Repenting of their sins, many people found great peace, comfort and hope in the message of Christ crucified. Why? Because they could finally be rid of all the guilt, shame and terror they felt because of their sins. By living, dying and rising from the grave, Jesus did everything that needed to be done for our forgiveness. Heaven's gate was now opened to all – the gate of Christ alone. All who believe in him have eternal life.

But not everyone was rejoicing in this news. We read: *The next day, the rulers, the elders, and the experts in the law assembled in Jerusalem* <sup>6</sup> *with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the rest of the high priest's family.* The people mentioned here were all people

of importance - composing the very court that condemned Jesus to crucifixion just months earlier. They were also mainly Sadducees – all upset with Peter’s preaching because it contradicted any comfort they tried to derive by denying any notion of a resurrection or afterlife. They hated the fact that these two disciples preached in Jesus’ name. Even more disturbing was the fact that they performed a miracle. These facts made them feel uncomfortable because it challenged the security they found in not having to worry about an afterlife, or be responsible to God. They hated it, so they had to persecute it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the opposition the disciples faced in Jerusalem is really no different than what Luther faced during the reformation, or what we face today. Even though God gave us his Gospel to offer forgiveness, life and salvation to all, the Gospel also has the effect of hardening those who don’t want to believe it. Why? Well, some just don’t want to admit that they are bad people, who need a Savior. Others simply don’t want to accept the fact that God holds them accountable for their thoughts, words and deeds. They want to ignore the problems of sin, death and damnation, rather than actually deal with them.

This is why the wonderful message of salvation we confess is often met with hostility. And when it is, don’t we sometimes become a little too scared to share it? We don’t want people to hate us. We don’t want conflict. Therefore, when push comes to shove, wouldn’t it be better to just keep quiet? No. And why not? Because God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth – including the people who oppose us! This is why he asks us to be bold - trusting in his promises to be with us as we witness his name. He promises to send His Spirit to give us the very words we need to speak as we, in all gentleness and respect, offer others the reason for the hope we have. Why? Because, at times like this, it is not we who speak, but the Holy Spirit himself as He points to Christ alone as the only way of salvation.

Part Two: The only message that saves.

<sup>7</sup> *After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: “By what power or by what name did you do this?”* The members of the Sanhedrin were gruff - doing all they could to intimidate Jesus’ disciples. They knew full well what the disciples did and in whose name it was done. But they didn’t want to mention these things, lest they themselves give credit and credence to Christ. No, they wanted the disciples to cower at their power. Maybe they could get these unschooled men to deny Jesus. Maybe they could, somehow, punish them because of their adherence to a convicted and crucified blasphemer!

Peter’s response, however, is masterful. We read: <sup>8</sup> *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, <sup>9</sup> if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed.*

Peter gave glory where glory was due: the beggars healing was all Christ’s doing and Christ’s alone. Yes, the same Jesus they crucified, God raised from the dead. The miracle proves it. Peter freely and boldly confesses Christ – not in order to offend the Sanhedrin, but to call them to

repentance. God also wanted them to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. He wanted them to give up their unbelief and pursuit of power and luxury – turning to him alone for salvation.

<sup>11</sup> *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. That is to say, “The same Jesus, whom you not only refuse to believe in but also killed, is the only foundation upon which God wants believers to build their life. And why?”*

<sup>12</sup> *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*

You have probably heard it said that there are many paths to heaven and that all religions are basically the same: just live a good life and you’ll get to heaven. But God’s word emphatically tells us that this is not true. As we learned in our epistle lesson, no one has or ever will be good enough for God. We all have sinned and fall short of his glory. We need a Savior. We need Jesus.

He lived the perfect life of obedience to God’s law that we all failed to live. He died on the cross in payment for our sins. He rose again to show that God accepted his sacrifice. Because of Jesus, heaven is open to all and is received through faith in Christ alone.

Understand what Peter is saying: God does not want us to look to any other good work, god, saint or Virgin mother to assist us in our quest for heaven. None of these things actually help because, as the great apostle himself says regarding Jesus: *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*

And how happy I am to hear this news. It frees my burdened heart as I hope it frees yours too. I am at total peace with God. Why? Because I am such a good person? Definitely not! Rather, because of Jesus. His righteousness is my righteousness because he took my sin upon himself and died for it. I am free and forgiven – God’s child through faith; and so are you.

Let us, then, live as the dearly loved children of God that He declared us to be in Christ – ever turning from sin and turning to our LORD in faith. Let us ask the Lord to give us the same Spirit that He gave Peter and John: to courageously confess Christ in all gentleness and respect – unafraid to point out sin with the purpose of calling people to repentance so that they might see Christ more clearly.

Brother and sisters in Christ, you have the answer to the world’s most plaguing question: how can I be at peace with God? Through Christ alone! Live in the peace of that answer, and boldly share it with others. Why? Because it is the only answer that saves. Amen.