

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday After Easter, May 8, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 245:1-3, 217:3, 465, 466, 51.

Lessons: Isaiah 28:14-16, Acts 4:1-22, Matthew 21:23-27

Sermon Text: Acts 4:1-12.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday you heard that Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth. Peter proclaimed to the people in the temple courtyard that it was by faith in Jesus Christ that this healing took place, and he reminded the Jews who were listening to him that they were the ones who had crucified Jesus, ***“the Holy and Righteous One the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”*** Acts 3:15 (NIV)

Last week’s sermon ended with these words: ***“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”*** Acts 4:1-4 (NIV)

Last week Peter and John were preaching to the people. Today we see

PETER WITNESSES TO THE HIGHEST JEWISH AUTHORITIES

- 1. Peter emphasizes that it is by the name of Jesus that the lame man was healed,**
- 2. And that the “rulers and elders of the people” were guilty of rejecting Jesus and crucifying him.**
- 3. But Jesus has become the capstone and cornerstone, and salvation is not found anywhere else!**

Up to this time the Lord had permitted the Church to grow undisturbed since Pentecost. But Satan just couldn’t just let things continue that way. He had to stir up the old enemies of the Lord. They now had a chance to interfere and to hinder the work of the apostles. Peter was still teaching the people in the temple courtyards when he and John were arrested and put in jail.

The priests were ***“greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”*** And the Sadducees, members of the high-priestly party, would especially be angry. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead and that was an essential point that Jesus was raised from the dead, and that this fact proved his Messiahship. Jesus had, on one occasion, emphasized the resurrection of the dead against the error of the Sadducees to their face, but they had hardened their hearts against the truth and were determined not to tolerate its teaching. Jewish officials knew that they had to act quickly. So they simply arrested the two apostles, and put them in jail for the night. But the Word of God which Peter and John were preaching had results. God worked repentance and faith in people’s hearts. They had heard the Law. The people were the ones who had crucified Christ, and they had also heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who was raised from the dead to deliver forgiveness of sins. With the power of the Word influencing hearts, the church expanded in spite of threatening danger.

“The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’” Acts 4:5-7 (NIV) And not only were the rulers, the elders and the scribes gathered against these two men, but

others of the clan of the high priest were there, too, on this day. Annas, the former high priest, Caiaphas his son-in-law and other relatives were lined up against Peter and John. They all thought that right here was an opportunity to stamp out this sect which believed Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Peter and John were brought in front of this tremendous array of Jewish power. We could call this large gathering “The Supreme Court and The Congress” of Israel at that time. And the man who had been healed was also standing there.

Then, this powerful court ***“began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’”*** We don’t know what ideas the members of the court had in their minds to accuse and find Peter and John guilty of, but they definitely wanted to destroy Christianity.

How did and could these two men dare to claim that Jesus the prophet from Nazareth, the one these powerful men had sent to the cross, was responsible for this healing? If they had been doing it by the power of anyone except the true God, they should be put to death according to the Law of Moses.

In this time of crisis, Peter was filled with a special measure of what Jesus had promised when he had told his followers: ***“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”*** Luke 12:11-12 (NIV) ***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 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.’”***

The Holy Ghost took charge of his mind and his words. The council had asked in whose name and by whose authority the apostles were acting. Speaking plainly, Peter makes a confession of his faith and of his ministry.

Peter admonishes the leaders of the Jews for making healing a crime. He is, in a sense, asking them ‘what kind of people find fault with ***“an act of kindness shown to a cripple”***?’

These simple men, once fishermen but now “fishers of men” say to the highest powers of the Jews, as they had told the people gathered at the temple on the day before that this man was standing before them in full health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead.

As a result of this witnessing, not only the entire nation of Israel would be able to learn about Jesus, but the entire world might learn – through this event recorded in Scripture by the Holy Spirit – of the saving name of Jesus Christ.

The leaders of the Jews had been led by God to ask: ***“By what power or what name did you do this?”*** Peter is boldly answering their question. It was by Jesus’ name that this miracle had been done.

This was Peter’s answer and this statement needed no proof. The judges could not deny that the miracle had actually been performed with the man standing in front of them. Peter’s boldness and the Holy Spirit led him to quote Psalm 118: ***“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.”*** Psalm 118:22 (NIV) These words were the same words which Jesus, a short time before, had quoted to a committee of the same Sanhedrin, when they asked him ***“By what authority are you doing these things? ... And who gave you this authority?”*** Matthew 21:23 (NIV)

The rulers of the Jews were like men who tried to build a house and foolishly rejected the only stone which could be the corner of the foundation upon which the whole building was to rest. Jesus was the Stone ordained by God as the foundation of his Church.

The word translated capstone or cornerstone is a special stone. It can be the capstone, the keystone, the top stone of a stone arch, without which the arch and building would collapse. It may also be the cornerstone, which in ancient architecture determined the straight line for the walls of the building. Without a cornerstone or with a poorly carved and not square cornerstone there could be no sound construction. But this was the important stone which the building absolutely needed.

To call Jesus the capstone here was to say that without Jesus Israel’s faith could not stand. Rejecting him was rejecting the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Peter tells them the prophecy of Psalm 118 had been fulfilled. The Jews had rejected Christ, and thus spoken judgment upon themselves. In spite of everything, Jesus was and will remain the Cornerstone, the very Foundation of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

And not only that, but Peter plainly says that in no one else is there salvation, for there is also no other name under heaven that is given among men by which we must be saved, by which we can be saved. The salvation earned by Jesus is complete, and it is the only eternal salvation to be found anywhere. His name, the Word of redemption, is given, is proclaimed to men, throughout the world, and whoever will be saved must turn to this one Source and Author of everlasting life

This man received physical healing. Eternal healing and salvation also come for all who believe. Both come from Jesus of Nazareth. Salvation is found in him and in him alone. Without this conviction, without faith, there can be no salvation and the church would lose its reason for being. The true God is committed to this salvation in Jesus Christ. Even those who condemned Jesus and asked Peter and John this hostile question could be saved by repentance and faith in him.

We are living in times when Christianity is under great attack. Laws are being passed and enforced in our country and around the world which attack Christians for saying what God plainly says in his Word. We can only expect greater persecution.

But in Peter we can find an example and hope when we are called to witness, to tell what it is that we believe. He turned to the Word of God.

May the Holy Spirit lead us to learn, to speak, and to boldly bear witness to the only way to eternal life – through faith in Jesus Christ! Amen.