**Acts 4:8-12** April 19, 2015

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter 3

*Ac 4:8 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.”*

Dear Friends in Our Savior,

The long season of presidential campaigning has begun. May it be distant thunder to all of you: a storm that will come, but which you can ignore for the next 14 months, until it actually matters. In politics, the juciest, tastiest food is not policy but controversy, scandal. The one side tries to expose the scandal, the other side tries to contain or hide or deny it. It is a dirty business.

The religious authorities of Judaism were trying to keep a lid on the scandal of Jesus’ death. The authorities had felt threatened by him. So they had him arrested in the middle of the night, and before the sun was hot was crucified. Pretty efficient. Yet even though they had dispatched with Jesus, his name would not go away. As they say in the media business these days, this scandal had legs, it kept running.

The day before our reading a lame man had been healed. The big problem was that everyone knew this lame man, he was not some unknown home-bound man. He had been begging at the temple gates for years. Think of that. If a beggar had been begging at the door of this church every single Sunday for years you would know him. All of you would know him. And if one day he could suddenly walk, you would all know it! This well-known beggar at the temple doors got healed. And he wasn’t one of those quiet souls like me who would walk home and thank God in the privacy of his own family. He made a big deal about it. He started running around the temple courts. He was like our puppy dog when we get home. Jumping around, making a lot of noise out of pure excitement, “Hey everybody! Look at me! I can walk! And these guys did it. They just said ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk,’ and look at me!” (Acts 3:6-10).

Now if you were the sort of person who had underhandedly murdered a popular man by the name of Jesus, this was the last thing you wanted. So the healers in Jesus’ name: Peter and John, were promptly arrested.

The next day they stood before the court. Surely they remembered what this same court had done to Jesus only a few weeks earlier: Death by crucifixion. Now the same unsmiling judges asked, *“By what name did you do this?”* What would they say? What would you say? I’ll tell you what Peter did. ***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people!... know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth… that this man stands before you healed”*** (8,10). The Name of Jesus!

**The Name of Jesus – What Is It?**

Is Jesus’ name sort of like magic? If you say it just right, amazing things start to happen? Lots of movies and books out there these days are about that sort of thing: Harry Potter and all that. Does Jesus’ name work that way?

No. And the Apostle Peter didn’t even hint at that. When Peter started to talk about Jesus’ name, he said that there is a lot of meaning in those two syllables. ***“It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.”*** The message of Jesus Christ is always, and I mean always, connected with those points. “Jesus” is no mere name. His name is simply the beautiful wrapping paper around a grand and glorious gift. The name “Jesus” means that the Son of God died for us. There is a cross in that name. The name “Jesus” tells us that he rose and that we will too. There is an empty tomb in that name. That name is heavy with meaning. It gives life.

That is why it is a sin for anyone to use his name in vain, to curse with Jesus’ name, to swear by Jesus’ name. His name represents the greatest gift God has given to any of us. And so you should find it offensive when people use your Savior’s name in useless ways. Now that does not allow us to respond in violent or hateful ways at all. But no more than we are willing to allow other people to insult our family and friends should we say it doesn’t bother us when people use Jesus’ and God’s name in bad ways.

Jesus’ name is the name of someone who has loved us greatly, and whom we love greatly.

**The Name of Jesus – What Is It Worth?**

Sometimes, when visiting America from Africa, we have handed out money from Africa. Sometimes we would give children a fifty kwacha bank note from Zambia, as a little reminder of world missions. Sooner or later someone would always ruin the matter and ask, “How much is this 50 kwacha bill worth?” “Oh, about a penny.”

As Peter stood there before the unfriendly courtroom, he knew he had that a problem. He had handed out the name of Jesus, but most counted it as a worthless currency.

Kind of like when I go to Home Depot or Lowe’s looking for lumber (haven’t been to 84 Lumber yet). When I look in that bin of 2x4s or 1x8s, there is a lot of junk. Warped boards, split boards, junk. I wish they would just throw them into the incinerator.

Kind of like when you pick out produce at the supermarket on a bad day. Bruised bananas, tomatoes with soft spots, overripe peaches – better not to get anything than to buy those.

That was Jesus in the eyes of the judges that day. Peter confronts them on that point. ***“He is ‘the stone you builders rejected.’”*** Yes, Jeus was rejected by the “builders”, the mighty of his day—tossed out like a rotten banana, a warped board, a cracked brick. The influential, the powerful did not want their lives upended by what that Jesus of Nazareth was saying and doing. Jesus’ name was worthless to them.

What is Jesus worth to the people around you? The same answer that Peter saw in the eyes of the judges is the answer you see in the eyes of some of your family members, some of your colleagues. What is Jesus worth? They think, “Jesus is for the easily fooled, the unschooled masses, the weak.” If you think that this is a new challenge we face in our day, stand with Peter on the floor of the Sannhedrin and look into the faces.

They despised Jesus. But Peter boldly said, ***“The stone you builders rejected… has become the capstone.”*** He is the prized piece of lumber, the perfect produce, or maybe better, the flawless piece of granite. Briefly, the capstone was probably something like a large rock that would be placed to bond two walls together. Strong and flawless. While rejected by others, Jesus is the most valuable thing you can ever hope for.

What makes this name valuable? ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”*** (12). I don’t think that the Apostle Peter would have been very popular in our day and age. We have heard many say that all roads lead to heaven. Someday soon it may even become criminal to say what Peter said: ***“Salvation is found in no one else… there is no other name…”*** So, what makes Jesus so valuable, is the very thing that makes him so objectionable. The fact that Jesus is the only ticket to be saved, the fact that all other tickets have no safe landings, that very fact is what makes people not want Jesus

And so it is in the age of inclusivism and toleration. As long as you don’t claim any ground as uniquely yours, you are tolerated. But as soon as the Holy Spirit says that we can lay claim to heaven in only one name, hackles rise.

Jesus’ name is valuable because only in it can we be saved.

**The Name of Jesus – How to Get It**

If the name of Jesus is so valuable, so important to life, then how can we get it? How much does it cost?

The old saying goes, “If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.” But with the most precious commodity of all time, it is quite different. Simplybelieve. Someone else asked how to get that precious name, and here is the answer another apostle gave: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”* (Acts 16:31). Jesus himself said, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16).

Now, we might smugly sit back and say—like winners sometimes will—“Yep, we’re right.” But then we aren’t really any better than some non-Christians accuse us of being. Just people who think that they are better than everyone else. If Christ is the only medicine for the epidemic of sin, then we cannot merely protect our patent and watch our profits roll in. If Jesus is the only cure for sin, then it is our duty to share the medicine. We take the little plastic bottles full of Jesus’ name and a measuring spoon out into the world around us. We tell people that we have what they need. They can refuse – any sick person can refuse their medicine. But let us never be accused of keeping a secret cure to ourselves – the name of Jesus.

Sharing Jesus’ name is a frightening thing to do. An experienced Christian recently admitted it to me (and me too!) But when it comes to sharing the name of Jesus, don’t think of a frowning God in heaven who demands that we share Jesus’ name, or else!

Do any of you parents remember the first word your children spoke? When it comes to sharing the name of Jesus, think of a parent who lovingly coaxes the first word out of a two-year-old. (God is the parent, we are the two-year-old.) And when that first word is spoken, the parent rejoices and tells the neighbors and the grandparents, knowing that that first word will eventually be many more. I imagine that is how God thinks of us when we share the name of Jesus so that others can know it.

\* What is the name of Jesus? His name is all he did to save us from sin, death and the devil.

\* What is that name worth? His name is worth more than a mountain of gold, for it gives us something we cannot buy: forgiveness and eternal life.

\* How do we get some? Nothing but believe. And when we believe, we too will live a life of thanksgiving for our God. Amen.