**Acts 4:8-12** April 18, 2021

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

*Acts 4:5The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem… 7They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”*

*8Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! 9If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10then 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. 11He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ 12Salvation 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 Christ,

**Speaking Of Jesus**

**I. Jesus Is Special, Exclusive**

Are you a snob? I’ll bet you are.

Are you a coffee snob? People know you love coffee so they make you coffee—but you wish they wouldn’t. At least you are a nice snob: so when they offer you a cup, you smile, say thanks, and drink it anyway.

Maybe you’re an ice cream snob. The thought of buying one of those five quart buckets of ice cream sends chills up your spine. Not cold chills, but chills of horror when you imagine eating, what you call, ice milk.

Are you a lumber snob? You go to Home Depot for 2x4s. You want a straight-as-an-arrow plank with clean edges and almost no knots. There is a rack with a hundred pieces of lumber in it. You need two. You only find one.

I’ll bet you’re a snob about something.

The Apostle Peter was talking to another sort of snob: building snobs, masonry snobs. ***“The stone you builders rejected…”*** The builders were looking at stones for a house. A stone was brought to them from the quarry, but they found fault with it. They didn’t see how it could possibly be of any use, not in the columns out front, not as an ordinary block in the wall, not even as a foundation stone buried from sight. “Useless,” they declared, and threw it on the wagon going back to the quarry. “Reject” they stamped on it and tossed it in the garbage heap.

This masonry snobbery was a metaphor. It was a metaphor for a religious attitude toward Jesus. It was a metaphor for people who had heard lots about and from Jesus over the past three years. They had heard him speak, witnessed his actions, and at the end of it, since he wouldn’t go their way and he wouldn’t go away, they rejected him. In their case, they murdered him. Snobbery taken to extremes.

They were wrong, and Peter tells them they were wrong. He quotes Psalm 118, written centuries before Jesus, a psalm that was looking forward to the Messiah. ***“[Jesus] is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’”***

Peter was not the first to quote this Bible passage. A couple months earlier, just days before his own death, Jesus quoted this exact same Bible passage. He claimed to be that ***“capstone,”*** that stone that whether other people appreciate it or not, is the most important one of all! Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, (that’s what verse 8 tells us), repeats that claim for Jesus, a claim true for all the future of the human race: However much people, whether the authorities or the masses, academics or factory workers, when they reject Jesus, they reject the ***“only name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”***

This is a topic I mention probably a couple times a year in sermons. That may seem too often. Reflect, however, on the fact that almost every day, you are told the opposite! You are told everywhere, on the radio and on bumper stickers, in podcasts and at coffee shops, both directly and indirectly, that all roads lead to heaven, that all religions worship the same God. I challenge anyone to find that one in the Bible. And it isn’t that the people of the Bible didn’t know any better. They knew a myriad of religions. Peter (and last week, Paul) in their ocean of different gods, had no time for the religious pluralism of our day. Least of all did Jesus.

Now here we must be clear about two things.

First of all, any person of any Christian denomination who acknowledges Jesus as their only Savior from sin, their only Savior for eternal life, is saved. That is God’s declaration, and therefore ours.

Second, even though we believe Jesus is the only Savior, we also realize that it is not for us—even though some Christians have done this at times—it is not for us to propagate the Christian faith through use of force. Nor is it the Church’s right to impose earthly penalties on any other faith. In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus told his disciple to put down his sword, Jesus forever prohibited the extension of the Christian faith by physical force. We speak Jesus exclusively, but we force none. That is religious toleration. We can be very glad that is in our nation’s constitution. But religious toleration is not religious pluralism. We never shrink back from the central claim of the Christian faith, ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”***

Christians have to remember the exclusivity claims that Jesus made for himself, that his apostles repeated time and again. You need to beware of challenges to this truth in our day, both from outside the church, and from inside. Yes, even inside. I have not heard this here or in our synod. But in 2019 the largest Lutheran church body in America presented a declaration in their convention. This declaration cautioned Christians against thinking that the Christian faith is more right than other faiths. There were Jewish rabbis, Muslim clerics, and others up on the stage. There was a feeling of celebration in the air. Much to the annoyance of the chairperson, a delegate submitted an amendment. He moved to strike some of the inclusive words and replace them with the words of John 14. *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (Thank God for that voice acknowledging his Savior!) Immediately, a pastor at the convention stood up, saying how offended she was that this delegate would talk so exclusively about Jesus in front of the honorable representatives of others faiths up on stage. His motion to attest Jesus as the only source of salvation was quickly called. 97.5% of the Lutherans in attendance voted him down. Only 2.5% of the delegates were willing to acknowledge what Peter said in our reading: “Jesus is the only name for salvation.” Don’t think that all Lutherans are the same. (Link: https://juicyecumenism.com/ 2019/08/12/elca-goes-universalist/)

When we speak about Jesus, we must speak as Peter did, that Jesus is unequivocally the only way God has revealed to us to be saved.

**II. We Speak with Confidence**

When it comes to speaking about Jesus, one thing that we often lack is confidence. We can lack that confidence for many reasons.

**A.** One of the reasons that we lack confidence is that we feel that we must speak winsome and persuasive words. I understand that. We feel like we somehow have to make a grand declaration. Christ did not call all to be apostles, or even pastors. But Christ has called you to be fathers and mothers, neighbors, co-workers and classmates.

You will have your times and places to talk about Jesus. One important thing to remember is how simple the words of the Peter are in our reading. He doesn’t preach a 20 minute sermon. He doesn’t, like the Apostle Paul, delve deep into theological arguments. He simply gives glory to Jesus. ***“Salvation is found in no one else.”*** Speaking of Jesus is far more about giving credit to Jesus than convincing anyone. We simply speak the fact that we are sinners and that Jesus is our Savior. We aren’t about answering all their questions. If you can, great. Or if you can turn them to good resources, great. But it is simply about acknowledging Jesus before people. Jesus told his followers, *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”* Jesus didn’t make it about convincing anyone. He didn’t say you needed *x* number of converts in a lifetime. He simply said, acknowledge me. That’s it. That free us up with confidence.

**B.** We can also lack confidence because we don’t want to look stubborn. I told you about that synod convention. You should have seen some of the looks that man got because he wasn’t going along with the show, because he wasn’t willing to bury Jesus in the same grave as Moses and Mohammed. It was more than an awkward moment. I have to say, just watching the video, my stress level went up. Even while I was internally congratulating him, I was also very much aware what an awkward moment was unfolding. There are some times that people expect you to rock the boat. But when people of different faiths are together, that is bad form.

Blessed be the stubbornness of that man in that convention. If he had not stepped up, no one, I repeat, no one, would have honored the name of Jesus. When he got stubborn, at least then there was a chance for people to hear the truth and to be saved. Satan loves to make us afraid of the group. He loves to make us feel like speaking up would be bad manners. He loves to convince us to just keep it to ourselves. Defy him, with a prayer and Christ’s name.

**C.** There is another reason we can lack confidence to speak about Jesus.

Do you know what Peter had done about two months before this? He had denied Jesus! You remember the story. He denied Jesus three times!

Speak about Jesus and living for him, and people will be quick to say, “Who are you to lecture me? I know you. I remember that time back in college… I heard about what you were like when deployed overseas…” People could look at the Apostle Peter and say, “So, you are going to lecture us about how important Jesus is, when you just not so long ago denied him on oath!” Satan loves to convince us that our sinful lives—and they are sinful, aren’t they?—that they disqualify us from speaking to others about their sins and therefore their Savior.

Peter found no contradiction in this all. He spoke not of a moral code that could get you into heaven. If he had, he would have been disqualified. That’s what every other religion in the world preaches! Peter spoke of a Savior. That’s what no other religion in the world preaches. He spoke of one who saw our brokenness, our daily sins, and who had mercy on us. Peter spoke not of pleasing God, but of trusting God. And so, *even he* could speak with confidence, because it wasn’t about him, but about his Savior.

I would like to share another story about speaking about Jesus publicly. If you read this month’s *Forward in Christ* magazine, this will be a repeat. It was on the back cover. But I want everyone to know it.

A pastor of our fellowship was invited to speak at a high school’s interfaith club. There was a panel of four religious leaders: a Hindu priest and a couple Muslim imams, and him as the Christian representative. Each gave an opening statement. The others first spoke of their faith, their morality, and likewise their respect for Jesus. As this pastor approached the mic, he said, “I could feel the pressure to be nice and not to set my own faith apart and above others.” But he couldn’t do it. After a quick prayer he said, “There are three differences between all of us up here on this stage. First, we say that God is triune…Second, we say that Jesus was God in the flesh… Finally we say that Jesus saved us from our sins and their punishment.” Turning to the other leaders he asked, “You don’t believe or teach those things about Jesus, do you?” Was that unkind? Was that bad form? Was he a snob? What if he had just gone along? You know. The only name by which we must be saved, would not have been heard. (*FIC*, April 2021, abr.)

God strengthen us, each in our place, to confidently speak about Jesus, the only saving name. Amen.