

**Acts 4:1-12 (Fourth Sunday of Easter—Series B)****“Exclusively Jesus”****Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT****April 25, 2021**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our text is the First Reading from Acts 4:

<sup>1</sup>While they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came, <sup>2</sup>annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead, <sup>3</sup>and they laid hands on them and took them into custody until the next day (for it was already evening). <sup>4</sup>And many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of men was about five thousand. <sup>5</sup>And it happened that on the next day their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup>also Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and as many as were from the high priestly family. <sup>7</sup>And after they stood [Peter and John] in their midst, they began to inquire, “By whose power or by whose name did you do this?” <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup>if we, today, are being examined on the basis of a good deed to a sick man, by what means this man stands healed, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands before you healthy. <sup>11</sup>This [Jesus] is the stone, who was rejected by you, the builders, who has become the head of the corner. <sup>12</sup>And salvation is not in any other, for no other name under heaven is the one given among people by which it is necessary for us to be saved.”

They had simply given a beggar what they had to give, and it had landed them in jail for the night. Peter and John had been going up to the temple for prayer at three in the afternoon. A man lame from birth was laid once again, as he was every day, at the temple gate called “the Beautiful Gate.” He asked for alms from those entering the temple, gifts to help him live because he was unable to work and to earn a living. The two Apostles were going in for the service of prayer and he asked them for alms.

Luke tells us what happened next. “And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, ‘Look at us.’ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up,

he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:4-8 ESV).

Peter and John had simply given this man what they had to give, God's own gift of mercy in the name of Jesus Christ. We could call it "salvation," or perhaps "saving health," either of which really covers both bodily and spiritual healing.

Well, a cripple from birth who is no longer crippled drew a crowd who was astounded at this! Peter used the opportunity to give a Law—Gospel message to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all" (Acts 3:12-16 ESV).

And that's what got Peter and John arrested with a free night in jail. The high-priestly family got really annoyed because these two were, first of all, teaching the people, but more importantly, they were teaching the people by proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. It's important here to realize that the high-priestly family—Annas and Caiaphas—in fact, all the high priests from the reign of Herod to the outbreak of the war with Rome in A.D. 66, belonged to the party of the Sadducees. And if you've paid attention in Bible class,

you know that one of the Bible teachings that the Sadducees denied was the resurrection of the body. That's why they are sad, you see.

After their night in lock-up, Peter and John were stood in the midst of the council and the question was put to them: "By whose power or by whose name did you do this?" In other words, "There's no reason that we can think of *for people like you* to have done such a thing in healing a lame man." They were not rabbis, prophets, or even members of the religious elite. So how could people like Peter and John do such a thing as this—bring saving health to a cripple? The answer: exclusively Jesus.

Jesus, the One who has the visible wounds of the nails in His hands, Jesus who was crucified and is risen from the dead, this flesh and blood living Jesus, is the answer to the religious leaders' question. "If we, today, are being examined on the basis of a good deed to a sick man, by what means this man stands healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands before you healthy. This [Jesus] is the stone, who was rejected by you, the builders, who has become the head of the corner. And salvation is not in any other, for no other name under heaven is the one given among people by which it is necessary for us to be saved."

What was done through Peter and John for this lame man was done by Jesus Christ. Salvation/saving health was given to the lame man by the name of Jesus Christ, by the power of Jesus Christ. Peter and John were the "means of grace" that the Lord Jesus used to accomplish this good work. But the accomplishment of the work was done exclusively by Jesus!

Salvation, physical and spiritual, is exclusively in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only true God who took on human flesh for the purpose of bearing the world's sin and suffering death and hell under the wrath of God the Father in order to earn forgiveness and eternal life for all people. No one else has done this for you! No one else could. St Paul writes in Romans 5, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8 ESV).

Jesus Christ of Nazareth bore the world's sins on the cross so that saving health in body and soul would be yours by grace through faith in His Gospel alone. The redemption from sin, death, and Satan that Jesus won for you is both physical and spiritual. It is truly salvation—saving health—to you in the forgiveness of sins. You are forgiven as a whole person—soul and body. You have eternal life as a whole person—soul and body. Not even physical death can stop this because your soul and body will be reunited in your resurrection from the dead. Christ will raise you—the whole you—from death on the Last Day. Salvation in Jesus means the resurrection of the body.

The world, our culture, and society seek spiritual things. As humanity was created in the image of God, we're hard-wired that way. Although, the wiring is all messed up because of sin. So people seek spirituality in all kinds of places. They seek saving health in all sorts of different religions and religious-sounding ideas. They look for saving health and feel-good remedies in psychics and in eastern meditation rituals, in crystals and horoscopes. Some take an eclectic approach to find what they need—taking a little philosophy here, a little Hinduism

there, a tad of humanism blended with just a pinch of Islam. But they never find what they are looking for. They can't seem to get a hold of that saving health that they so crave. If you've ever tried it, then you know. Maybe you've sampled from the blended mix that the world offers. It feels good for a time. Maybe it works for you for a while. But you end up unfulfilled, not satisfied, without real hope and real peace and true comfort. That's because hope, peace, and comfort—salvation, saving health—are exclusively in Jesus.

Theology professor Carl Braaten wrote in his 1992 book, *No Other Gospel!*, "If you can point to God where Jesus is not or to Jesus where God is not, you have a divided Christ and therefore a useless Savior" (27). Salvation is only in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, true God and true Man, who suffered, died, and rose again. In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). Not in a good person; not in a special teacher; not in an ideal model of humanity—but exclusively in Jesus, the Son of God who became flesh and died on a cross for you! He's the only One who suffered for your sins, the only One who faced death and hell in your place. And God raised Him from the dead in victory. Yes, the marks of the nails are still visible. That's how you know you've got the real Jesus! That's how you know there truly is salvation for you because Jesus, who was crucified for you, now lives and reigns to all eternity! Jesus has saved you in body and soul unto life everlasting in a new creation that will be yours in the resurrection on the Last Day. We read in 1 Peter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by

God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:3-5 ESV).

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, you will not find this saving health in any of the world's other so-called "great religions." You will not find it in alternative forms of spirituality. Salvation is exclusively Jesus Christ. David says in Psalm 37, "The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble" (Ps. 37:39 ESV). And in Psalm 68, "Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death" (Ps. 68:20 ESV). Jesus exclusively shed His blood for you on the cross and cleanses you from all your sins. Jesus exclusively saved you from death by His rising from the dead. And He will raise you from the dead on the Last Day and give to you and to His whole Church eternal life in the resurrection. "Salvation is not in any other, for no other name under heaven is the one given among people by which it is necessary for us to be saved."

Knowing this Gospel of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and the forgiveness, life, and salvation He has given to you, will you give what you have to another? Will you give God's own gift of mercy in the name of Jesus so that someone else might receive salvation through the forgiveness of sins exclusively in Jesus? Amen.