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NO OTHER NAME BY WHICH WE CAN BE SAVED

Chapters 3 and 4 of Luke's 'Acts of the Apostles' are especially relevant to us as evangelists because they deal with salvation and the promise of Eternal Life.

We read in Acts 3 that Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer and a man, lame from birth, lying by the entrance to the Temple tried to attract their attention begging for alms. 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 the cripple by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. He began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who sat at the Gate of the

temple asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

But Peter said “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 our fathers glorified his servant Jesus, whom you denied even when Pilate had decided to release Him. Instead you asked for a murderer to be spared, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name - the name of Jesus, this man this been healed in the presence of you all”.

This was all too much for the Temple authorities so they arrested Peter, John and the healed cripple and placed them in custody overnight to appear before the authorities next day, for it was already evening.

In the morning the elders and scribes gathered together with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and members of the Council.

And when they had set them in their midst, they inquired, “By what authority and by what name did you do this?” .

How did Peter respond? Indeed how would we respond to the charge that, by preaching the truth about Jesus, we have caused offence to people of a different religion or of none ?

Here is the knub of my sermon. For make no mistake, persecution is already rampant in parts of Africa and Asia a especially wherever Islamist and Hindus feel threatened by the spread of Christianity. As Peter Murcott has evidenced in his sermons, such persecution is increasing in the West. In the UK we read of a nurse being ordered to remove her Christian

Cross or face disciplinary action; of nurses being reprimanded for offering to pray for their patients; street preachers are arrested by the Police in London. Relentless efforts are in hand to make so called 'Conversion Therapy' a punishable offence. .

Here on the Island members of our congregation experienced focussed abuse when witnessing against the proposed introduction of an amendment to the Abortion Bill (up to full-term), and our own Ros was recently removed as a Supply Teacher from one of our Island Secondary Schools after a complaint by a parent that she had spoken about Jesus in answer to a question from members of her class.

Quite soon we may find ourselves being asked formally "By what authority and by what name do you uphold Jesus?".

When faced with that question by the Chief Priest and his Council, Peter and John didn't hesitate. .

We read in Acts 4 verse 10. "Let it be known to all of you rulers and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—that this man is standing healed before you. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you which has become the cornerstone. And verse 12 - there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common

men, they were astonished. And they recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus.¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside Peter and John they had nothing to say in opposition.¹⁵ When they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another,¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? It is evident that a notable act has been performed by them in front of many people and we cannot deny it.¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.”¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak nor teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go.

What exactly did Peter and John mean when they insisted “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men^l by which we must be saved.”

There are, I suggest, three key questions that need to be answered about this salvation – about being saved?

1. From what are we to be saved in this life?.

We can be saved from a life without Jesus.

We are told that 95% of UK citizens under the age of 25 have no personal knowledge of, nor interest in Jesus.

We see all the ingredients of mental illness : despair, hopelessness, purposelessness and lack of love. We see wide-spread dishonesty and corruption. We see little evidence of abundant life except in Jesus's followers nor of Hope for Eternal Life. We also see increasing suicide among the young.

This is what our people, our friends and neighbours, can be saved from in this life.

2. From what can we be saved in the life hereafter?

We have discussed this many times. When our hearts stop our bodies and minds die instantly. But our soul (our innermost being), does not die (Ecclesiastes 12 v 7) - and Jesus had much to say about what happens to our soul as we transit from this life to the next. In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7 v: 13 and 14) Jesus warned "Enter the life hereafter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and few there are who find it" ..

The difference between the two realms DESTRUCTION and LIFE - - torment - and paradise – intermediate hell and intermediate heaven - is stark. And Jesus spelt it that out explicitly in His parable in Luke 16 : vv 19-- 31.

There is a great uncrossable gulf between the two; And our souls will remain in one or the other until our resurrection on Judgement Day. And thirdly.....

3. What must we do to be offered this salvation?

We must believe on Jesus as our Saviour and repent, turning our backs on our disbeliefs. It is explicit in the Creed which we are about to affirm together in this service.

The Creed.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, and He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

One final point. What did Peter and John do after their release from the Council?

They met with their believing friends (Verse 23), and prayed for Boldness. Not blundering – in, but in boldness when given the opportunity to witness by the Holy Spirit – an opportunity for which we must pray at the beginning of every day.

Jesus said "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves".
Amen