

By What Name?

Questions from Acts: Part 3 “By What Name?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 21 2024

4th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

Reflection: Psalm 23

Greeting: God is indeed my salvation; I will trust and won't be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my shield; He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of life that you have delivered to us, shown in the death of your Son. Help us to celebrate our Lord's resurrection as a sign of everlasting life. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ the Son, help us to share the gift of love we find in you our Heavenly Father, and guide us in the truth of your Holy Spirit. May we be one with each other as we are one in Christ Jesus. May we love you with our whole being, and may we share that love with one another. And may we be reminded of your redeeming grace and steadfast faithfulness all the days of our lives. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. (Psalm 23 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 23, and we hear of rest and comfort with God. That the Lord is with us in both the pleasant and difficult times. That we always have safety in the presence of our Heavenly Father. Do you trust that God is there for you in every part of your life? Does that comfort help you to lift others up in your prayers? How do you share the peace of Christ with those around you? Do you listen for the Holy Spirit in good times and bad? How will you act in the name of Christ this week? What are you discovering as you live out your life in Christ?

Prayer: O God, our shepherd, our gate, our lamb: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your pasture. Guide us to your clear streams, and tame the wolf at our gate. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. We share with you the worries that we have spoken aloud. We share the celebrations that we have voiced together. Help us to

also share the silent pleadings from within. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in rejoicing, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 4, verse 5 through 12.

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:5-12 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 John chapter 3, verse 16 through 24.

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. (1 John 3:16-24 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 10, verses 11 through 18.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I

have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.” (John 10:11-18 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week's question might feel a little bit like last week's question. And you'd be right, as they both come on the heels of the same healing. This week the question is "by what name?" and it arises with the unfortunate holding of Peter and John by the religious authorities. They are being held as prisoners because of an act of healing that has taken place. You might be wondering why they are in trouble at all. But they are in trouble because they are preaching Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. Some of this is that the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. This makes them natural opponents of the followers of Christ. It is when the authority by which they are teaching and healing comes about that we get today's question. They want to know by what name the disciples are doing these things, because they want to know by what authority they are acting. If we remember last week, Peter had been asked by the crowds whose power they acted with when they were healing. This week, we are dealing with that same healing but now it is a question of authority. Because the religious authorities are involved, and they are not very happy about this new message. Why? The easiest answer is that they don't like anything that challenges their own power and authority. But Peter speaks boldly here with answers to their questions. Peter tells them that this good deed was done by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. That the stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone and that salvation is found by no other name. Now, I do want to note that Peter opens with this accusation that they are simply upset over good being done. He knows that they have nothing but jealousy and fear driving them. Peter is emboldened in the name of Christ to declare that they are inspired to do good because of Jesus. Peter calls them out for rejecting Christ, declaring that the one they rejected has become the only name by which one may be saved.

Our other readings give us some background for everything Peter is saying about Jesus. Because it isn't so much that the name itself is the power, it is who the name belongs to. Because when they act in the name of Jesus, they act by his authority and his grace. So, when they talk about by whose name they act, they are naming the one who has inspired them to live their lives in this way. We hear from the first letter of John that we know that this name is attached to one who laid down his life in love. That Christ laid down his life for us, and because of that we know love abides in us when we share that with others. How do we show it? Not by speech, not by word, but we show it in our actions. We hear that from John. That we should be bold in doing what Christ taught us. That we should be bold in following his example. That we should be bold in how we love each other. That we believe in the name of Christ because it is the name of the one who lays down his life for others. It is the name of the one who showed such an extreme love on the cross and an extreme love in the resurrection. That we love in his name because that is what he has taught us to do. That when we live in Christ, we die in Christ, and are raised in Christ. That we live a life through Christ and that we live by his name. And we

hear this echoed again in John's Gospel when we hear Jesus describe himself as the good shepherd. He is the one who's willing to lay down his life for the sheep, the one who truly loves and truly cares. He is the one who sets an example for all. That the Father loves him because he lays down his life and takes it up again. That no one forces him to do anything. That he does it out of love for his people. That the example he has set for us in love is the one that we live by in his name. So, when we circle back to Acts, it gives us a deeper understanding of what Peter is declaring before the crowds. That when Peter stands up to defend their actions, he starts by noting that they are simply doing good in the name of Jesus. He is telling them that they do these good things because it is what Jesus taught. The Jesus that they turned over to be crucified. The Jesus they had executed is the reason they are healing. The Jesus they rejected has become the foundation for their faith. And it is by his name that they dare to be compassionate. It is by his name they dare to love one another. And that really is the accusation being made against them. The authorities are trying to find something wrong because they don't like it. Because this kind of love upsets their plans. It takes away from the power of the religious authorities to control the people.

I think that it's good for us to reflect on why Peter has been dragged before the authorities. Because Peter dared to heal someone in Christ's name. But I think it's also important for us to realize the example that Peter is setting in all of this. You'll notice that Peter is highlighting the things they are doing in the name of Christ. It isn't just that they are getting dragged in because of saying the name of Jesus. They have to ask him by what name he is acting. I mention this because sometimes we get the wrong idea about what it means to do things in Jesus' name. I think about this because sometimes we can get it into our heads that we're supposed to go stand on the street corner and scream Jesus' name as if that will change things. I have never heard somebody on a street corner screaming "believe in the name of Jesus" that made me feel any closer to Christ. I have never had a stranger in the street yelling "Follow Christ! Follow Christ!" that made me think I should follow Christ. But I have seen people feeding the hungry in the name of Christ that made me thankful for their love and their compassion. I have seen people offer someone a place to stay in the name of Christ and I have been glad to know them. When we go out and we feed the hungry, and we clothe the naked, and we comfort the afflicted in the name of Christ, we are sharing the love of Christ with others in a way that it cannot be shared with words alone. Because no matter how much I could say to you in here, the best result I could ever have is that it inspires you to go and do. That the knowledge of Christ that I can share with you inspires you to do more in Christ's name is the best I can hope for. Because the love of Christ isn't so much what we say but it's what we do in his name. Because I can say that Christ is love, but if the only thing people see is hate the only thing they'll understand is hate in the name of God. If I give compassion in my words and all people see is selfishness in the name of Christ, people will not come to associate compassion with the name of Christ. If we speak of inclusion for all of God's children and our actions make people feel excluded in Christ's name they will not see the Good Shepherd. They'll just see the judgmental flock.

We have to remember that what we do by Christ's name needs to reflect Christ. And it brings me back to what Peter was saying. By what name did we do this good thing? The name of Christ is the name that we did this good thing by. That we should be doing good in the name of Christ, loving our neighbor as ourselves to demonstrate the love that we have for our Risen Savior. Welcoming others in the name of Christ because we want all to feel welcome in Christ's house. Inviting all to God's table because all are deserving of the love of Christ in their lives. Because if somebody asks me "by what name did you invite all these people into God's house?" I can proudly say I did this good thing in Jesus' name. If someone wants to know by what name we have collected food to give to those who are hungry you can say we have done this good thing by Jesus' name. If they want to know why you have offered love to a person that they want to hate, you can say that you did this good thing in Jesus' name. Because I know that my Savior love me and that he loves them. So, I love them as well. And I know that my savior laid down his life for his sheep, so the very least I can do is offer love by that name. So let us always be able to say that by Jesus' name we do these good things. Let us be able to proclaim that it is by Jesus' name that we share the good news, that all may know hope, that all may know love, and that in Jesus' name all may know peace. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Questions from Acts

Our Easter series explores questions that we will take from our readings from the Acts of the Apostles. Each week we will reflect on the early church and the lessons we learn from the questions that they press us to answer.

April 7th – Who Is In Need?

April 21st – By What Name?

May 5th – Can Anyone Withhold?

May 19th – What Does This Mean?

April 14th – Whose Power Is This?

April 28th – What Is to Prevent Me?

May 12th – Who Will Witness?

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Marie R.
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks	

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