

Sermon for May 6, 2023 – The 5th Sunday in Easter

Acts 4:8-12 EHV

Theme: **God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.**

- 1) Don't reject him because he doesn't fit your life.
- 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on him instead.

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ⁹if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

As a Christian, I often wonder why people reject Jesus. I mean, the good news of who he is and what he has done for us fills me with so much hope, that I can't imagine being without him!

But when I take some time to consider how my sinful heart desires things that are contrary to God's will, how it wants to pat itself on the back for being a good person, and how it strives after the things of this world more than after Christ, then I begin to understand.

Our sinful human nature likes to think we can know and achieve everything on our own. Sure, we may not mind some help along the way, but what we don't want to believe is that we are so bad that we need a Saviour to rescue and reconcile us to God. Therefore, while the world is willing to accept Jesus as a great teacher and example, it rejects the idea of him being our only way of salvation.

How important it is, then, to contemplate the Holy Spirit's bold testimony through the Apostle Peter regarding Jesus, under the theme: **God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.** 1) Don't reject him because he doesn't fit your life. 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on him instead.

Part One: Don't reject him because he doesn't fit your life.

Our sermon text took place shortly after Pentecost. Jesus' crucifixion, which happened only a few months earlier, was still on everyone's mind.

Shortly before our sermon text, Luke records Peter and John healing a lame man in Jesus' name at the temple – impressing a large crowd of people. However, what the crowd found even more impressive was what Peter preached after the healing: that God had raised Jesus from the dead, whom they had handed over to be crucified. He is the Saviour God promised in Scripture – forgiving all who repent of their sins and turn to him in faith.

The priests, however, had Peter and John arrested for teaching the people about Jesus' resurrection. Why? Not because the evidence regarding Jesus' resurrection wasn't clear, but because Jesus didn't fit their idea of who the Saviour should be.

The next day, the entire Sanhedrin convened - the same Jewish high court that condemned Jesus. ⁷*After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: "By what power or by what name did you do this?"*

⁸*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ⁹if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed.*

As you can see, the High Court that condemned Jesus didn't intimidate Peter. Why? Because Jesus kept his promise to fill his followers with the Holy Spirit when called to testify.

And Peter was happy to answer their question: the person that healed the lame man was Jesus the Nazarene. They crucified him for blasphemy, even though no deceit was found in his mouth. They rejected him as their Saviour, even though he fulfilled every prophecy of Scripture concerning the coming Christ. Yes, everyone can know that Jesus is the LORD's promised Saviour. How so? Because God raised him from the dead – proving beyond any doubt that he has God's approval. More than that, Jesus still worked wonders that no one other than God could do – proved by healing the lame man.

Understand Peter's point in preaching boldly: it was not to say, "Nah, Nah, we were right, and you were wrong." No, Peter boldly testified to the truth for another purpose: that the very people who crucified Jesus might repent of their sins and be saved. For this reason, he continues:

¹¹*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.*
¹²*"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."*

The problem the Jewish leaders had with Jesus is the same problem the world has with him today. Instead of seeing him as the cornerstone upon which our entire life is built, they view him as just another human teacher vying for our attention. Sure, they will admit that he did some remarkable things they could not explain, but they have no use for him because he does not fit their idea of who the Saviour should be. In doing so, they reject the very cornerstone God provides for our life.

Cornerstones in ancient architecture were essential. A building's entire shape and measurement took direction from them, upon which every subsequent stone would be placed. Because this is the case, cornerstones are uniquely formed to serve that purpose. Why is that important to know? So, you can understand the mistake the world makes with Jesus. People see him as just another stone they can fit in their lives somewhere other than the foundation. They see him as a good example – someone who really cared for others and whom we should strive to be like – but that's it. And

because they only view Jesus superficially, they may be willing to accept the idea of Jesus as a part of their life but not as its foundation.

The problem is that Jesus will never fit as any old stone in a wall because that is not the type of stone God appointed Jesus to be. People who view Jesus superficially will ultimately become disappointed with him because he will not fit their expectations of what kind of Saviour he should be.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, because the same sinful nature that dwells in all people remains in us, we, too, feel the temptation to try to fit Jesus into our preconceived notions of how a saviour should act. We are tempted to get upset when he allows trials in our life that we think he shouldn't allow. We are tempted to believe he should listen more to us because we try our best to keep his laws. "I mean, I know I am not perfect, but at least I am better than many other people in the world – people the LORD seems to bless rather than me. Why, Jesus, do you do this?" Whenever we think such thoughts, we no longer see Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives, but ourselves. This is why things don't make sense. This is why things don't fit.

But God didn't send Jesus just to be another stone – one of the many ideas or philosophies we use in life. No, He raised Jesus to be our only Saviour, upon whom the Holy Spirit builds and directs our life.

Part Two: Let the Holy Spirit build your life on him instead.

Let's go back to Peter's statement regarding Jesus, whom God raised from the dead: ¹¹*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.* ¹²*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.*"

God sent Jesus to be our Saviour. His very name in Hebrew, "Yeshua," means: "The LORD's Saviour." And the fact that God sent a Saviour means we need saving!

But what do we need to be saved from? Bad politics, economics, and societal issues? No, we need a Saviour from sin. The Bible describes all humanity as so totally corrupt that even the inclinations of the human heart are only evil all the time. It says no one does good, not even one. Our sinfulness – our evil and rebellious nature over against God and his law – is something we inherited from our parents, going back to Adam and Eve. Even though we may be able to do some good in people's eyes, the truth is that God knows our hearts. Our sins have separated us from him to such a degree that he describes all people as dead – that is, unable to reconcile themselves to God.

You know, whenever people build a tall building, they need a pit in which to pour the foundation. Skyscrapers, for example, have foundations that go very deep in the ground to withstand all the intense storms that beat against them.

How does that apply to us? Recognizing our sins is like the pit into which a foundation is poured. If we only think of ourselves as a little sinful, we will assume we only need a little Saviour – and

Jesus won't fill that kind of pit. If, on the other hand, we accept what the Bible says about our condition – how helpless we are – then only Jesus can fill that void. And he freely does so out of undeserved mercy and love. Only Jesus, true God and true man, could satisfy in our place God's demand for perfect obedience to his law – thereby winning the righteousness we need to stand before God. Only he could take the sins of the world upon himself – suffering and dying for them all – to fulfill God's justice. And how do we know that Jesus accomplished all that? Because God raised him from the dead.

Yes, there is salvation in no one else. No human, angel, or other idol or god – could do what Jesus did. He is the only Saviour. Blessed is the person whom the Holy Spirit awakens to this truth. Acknowledging the depth of his depravity and need for a Saviour, such a man will turn to Jesus in repentance. And the Holy Spirit will fill the void of sin with the foundation of Jesus. And upon this foundation, he will build his life.

Yes, when the Holy Spirit sets Jesus as the cornerstone and foundation, we, by faith, will build on it by his direction. We will trust what Jesus says about himself, God's love, and our future. We will not view this world as the end-all and be-all of our existence but understand that we are strangers here: Heaven is our home. We will trust his promise to work in all things – even the great evils we may experience during our time on this earth - for our everlasting good. We will trust that he will provide all we need when needed. He will listen to our prayers. And if he doesn't give us what we ask? Then we will nevertheless trust that his grace, his undeserved love, will be sufficient for us – for his power is made perfect in weakness.

Yes, when the Holy Spirit places Christ – whom God raised from the dead – as the cornerstone of our life, our lives take on new purpose and meaning. We live in hope when the rest of the world despairs. We can stand through storms of life that wreck others. We shine the grace of Christ – reflecting his saving love to the loveless world around us so others might be saved.

And having Jesus as the foundation of our lives changes us. There is no more striving to earn God's favour. No, we live in the knowledge that we possess it by grace through faith. When feelings of guilt and shame arise, we take them to the cross – knowing that Jesus paid for them all. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit has cleansed us from all sin, robed us with Christ's righteousness, and made us children of God by granting us a new, spiritual birth. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we live in the confidence that He will also raise us on the last day – just as he promised. Then, as Jesus stated in our gospel lesson so beautifully, we will live in God's house with Jesus forever.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice in the beautiful hope you have in Jesus, and – like the apostle Peter – be willing to share it boldly with the world. **God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.** 1) Don't reject him because he doesn't fit your life. 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on him instead. Amen