

Sermon

Easter 4 Year B

Acts 4:5-12

The 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 questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are 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."

Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Sermon:

When I was a kid, we moved from one city or one state to another.

Once, in San Diego, I remember moving just across the street.ⁱ

Never gave it much thought. I was in 4th grade.

When we moved to San Diego, from Tulsa,

we got picked on a lot, because we weren't like everyone else.

I didn't think much about where we moved to,

'cause we moved so much,

But I did think about kids picking on my brothers and sisters.

*Didn't like that at all.*ⁱⁱ

It isn't any fun being on the outside.

In today's reading from Acts

we cover some of the most remarkable words ever spoken,

by St. Peter, one of history's most remarkable people:

"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

As you know I was baptized and confirmed a Roman Catholic.

As a young Catholic, I understood that

I was part of the “One True Church”.

In my late teens, I hung out with some “Christian” bible believers.

They also thought they had some sort of Jesus exclusive.

In the 1990’s, in my30’s,

I went to a lot of Promise Keeper’s conventions.

Really enjoyed that!

By then, I’d crossed the Tiber and joined the Episcopal Church.

Through all of those churches I’d learned some flexibility

In walking Jesus’ Way.

I’d figured out that Jesus is a very complicated guy.

I recall that, at one of the PK conferences,

Some guy I was talking with asked me *when* I was “saved”.

Not easy to answer, really. I mean, was I saved when

Father What’s-His-Name baptized me as an infant?

Or was I saved when I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior,

In my late High School years?

Or wasn't I saved, at my Sophomore Year at
the Dominguez Minor Seminary,
when Jesus spoke to me,
And confirmed my priestly vocation?

The Christian church, like the rest of the world, has tribes.

Oh, maybe tribes and nations that act like tribes.

It's some sort of phenomena.

Dolphins, whales, lions, deer, buffalos –

All kinds of animals - And people, hang together.

What that guy wanted to know was whether I was in his tribe?

Some folks are still like that. A lot actually.

hat Way was I headed, he was asking,

All I could think was, *Jesus' way is my way.*

Anyway, I avoided his question.

I didn't answer that guy at Promise Keepers.

There are times to discuss theology and there are times not too.

Waiting in line to buy a book, is not the time.

As you know, I took the long way to the Priesthood.

Four seminaries. Four different brands of Christianity.

Latin, English, and Greek.ⁱⁱⁱ

Turns out that such a broad exposure was a good thing.

I learned that *there is no magic formula to live as a Christian.*

What I should have told that guy at Promise Keepers was:

It's not so much a question of getting saved.

It's a question of living like a saved person.

Being “saved” is not an event. It is a way of living.

It's not so much where you go to church or

what style of prayers you say, or

what songs and hymns you sing.

It's how you choose to live in the world (but not of the world.)

With others, and for others, and standing by others

when they need a hand.

I read a story about a minister who hung out with folks

That his congregation didn't think were "saved".

They asked him:

"How can you hang out with people who are absolutely wrong?

They aren't going to heaven because

they don't believe in Jesus?"^{iv}

That guy was in a pickle. The story didn't say what his answer was.

We all know that Jesus said,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father, except through me."^v

But, what did Jesus actually mean?

What did he mean by "*I am the Way*"?

What does it mean to come to God "through" Jesus?

I did some home work, and this is what I learned.

When Jesus said "I am the way",

he used the Greek word ὁδός (*hodos*).

ὁδός (hodos) can mean a well travelled road, like Highway 190.

Like “what *hodos* did you take to church, today, Fr. Steve?”

ὁδός (hodos) can also mean *a way of living*.

“Hey, Fr. Steve, do people here live different then they do in LA?”

I learned that Christianity isn’t a moment or an event,

Or a slogan or simply a book called the Bible.

Christianity is way of living.

Christianity isn’t about whether each of us or all of us is saved
by some magic incantation.

Christianity isn’t about being baptized in just the right way.

Christianity is about how we live.

Christianity is about whether we live for others. Like Jesus did.

The Bible was written in ancient languages, in ancient times.

It’s not as clear as we’d like it to be.

Some Christians, who mean well,

treat the Bible like it is much more clear than it actually is.

If the Bible was more clear,

we'd have a lot more agreement amongst the churches.

But sometimes the Bible message *is* pretty clear.

Sometimes that's the message we really don't want to hear!

Sometimes you have to put the message in context.

If Jesus was being interviewed on TV, in Austin, today,

I don't think he'd say,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father, except through me.”

I think he'd say,

“ Y'all need to do your level best, to live like I lived.”

And how did Jesus live?

“For I was hungry” he said, “and you didn't give me food to eat”

“I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink”

“I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked,

and you didn't clothe me”

“I was sick, and you didn't visit me.”

“Inasmuch as you didn’t do it to one of the least of these,
you didn’t do it to me.” vi

Jesus is the way. *We need to do our level best, to live like he lived.*”

Our work as Christians is not so much to claim Christ,

But to live like Christ. Every day.

Not just here, on Sunday.

When we choose to live like Jesus Christ,

Wherever and whoever we are.

He will notice, and his love will surround us

and we will be blessed.

... With the peace that passes all understanding.

-AMEN

ⁱ Better view of Mission Bay. Bigger back yard. Small house.

ⁱⁱ In 3rd and 4th grade I ended up playground fights, protecting my little brothers and my sister from kids who made fun of them. Eventually, I wound up being the go-to-guy to help other little kids being bullied at Bay Park Elementary, in the late 1960's.

ⁱⁱⁱ Three different Greek text books (which didn't align).

^{iv} They were sure that God doesn't hear their prayers. They thought that the minister should be warning those others they were bound for hell fires. See, <https://sermonwriter.com/sermons/acts-45-12-jesus-way-anders/>

^v John 14:6, 14:6 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι' ἐμοῦ

^{vi} See, Matthew 25:42