

Fourth Sunday of Easter

NO STOPPING THEM

Acts 4:5-12

Fourth Sunday of Easter Analysis by Paul Jaster

5The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, 6with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" 8Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, 9if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, 10let 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. 11This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' 12There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

DIAGNOSIS: Stop in the Name of the Law

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Under Arrest*

Given that the high priests, Sadducees and Sanhedrin had a high profile in the arrest and trial of Jesus, it is not surprising that the same temple authorities are the first opponents of the new mission that proclaims Christ risen and alive and heals in

Christ's name. But notice how "lame" and "crippled" is their use of God's law. They are called to be good shepherds and stewards of God's promise. And they are to say that through Abraham's descendants all nations would be blessed and that Israel would be a light to the world. And yet, they arrest Peter and John because they were "annoyed" with the apostles' teaching and preaching that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. Some use of the law, isn't it? Confining and stopping those who "annoy" us. This is a role reversal. They are acting like a crippled beggar, lame from birth, using their authority under the law like a crutch to prop up their personal agenda (which is confining the Gospel word and controlling its spread). We, too, often use our religion to stop and control those who "annoy" us and who interfere with our personal agenda. Stop. Confine. Control. "You're under arrest."

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Shush*

Lame, too, is their verdict and decree. What happened to those loud cries for crucifixion? The healing of the crippled man is such a notable sign acknowledged by so many people that the higher ups cannot deny it or confirm it. And so, the Sanhedrin and all the high-priestly family try to "shush" Peter and John by ordering them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. A rather toothless court order, since they are listening only to themselves and not God. In the end, it is the Sanhedrin and the high-priestly family who are on trial here. More role reversal. They are the ones under accusation now. "YOU crucified the one whom God raised from the dead—Jesus Christ of Nazareth." That "YOU" is both personal and universal. For we had a hand in his crucifixion too—and still do!—when we listen only to ourselves, to our druthers and preferences, and not to God. This is the "proper" or kerygmatic use of the law: accusing sinners before the judgment seat of God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis : *No Salvation in Any Other*

"By what power or in whose named was this man healed?" the inquisitors ask. "Jesus Christ of Nazareth," Peter answers boldly, "...for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." The verdict of the temple guardians on Jesus is reversed by God himself. There is no power of salvation in anybody else. The healing that the lame man receives points to an even greater salvation—repentance, release from sins, wholeness and the blessings of the messiah's rule. This breaking in of the kingdom is available to anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord in Christ. And so this salvation is inclusive, not exclusive. It is not limited to us. And we should never underestimate the various and mysterious ways God works. As Jesus says in our gospel reading for today, *"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also.... So there will be one flock, one shepherd."* Wrapped up in Jesus Christ (and the Spirit that Jesus gives) is one God, one people, and one future for the world.

PROGNOSIS: Rise in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Overruled

The verdict of the Sanhedrin upon the death of Jesus is overruled by the resurrection and the power of Christ's name. As Peter puts it to the priests who are still chipping away at building their precious temple, *"the stone rejected by you, the builders; has become the cornerstone."* This is the gospel of Jesus Christ in its proper sense: the building of a community of faith upon the firm foundation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is led and empowered by Christ's Spirit. This community of faith is that temple not made with hands, which allows God to dwell within and be near at hand at any time of need, including imprisonment and threat.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : No Stopping Them

The power of Christ's name turns believers into bold witnesses who speak of what they have seen and heard. Far from being silenced, they are let go with even a bigger story to tell. The resurrection of Jesus changed the disciples from cowards into confessors. From timid mousy-minded men into persistent and determined witnesses to Jesus Christ. Is this the same Peter who denied Jesus three times to save his own skin? Something changed them. And nothing else explains a change like this except the resurrection of Jesus. Here they were, unskilled laymen, trained neither in the Scripture nor in the art of giving speeches, laying their life upon the line. Peter's words are a demonstration of the boldness the Spirit brings to those who cling to the power of Christ's name. There is no stopping of the gospel proclamation now. Intimidating inquisition is met with fearless inspiration.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Standing in Good Health, Leaping, Praising God*

Salvation is healing and wholeness with God, with others, and ourselves. The healing power of the resurrection was unleashed when Peter said to a man born lame, "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.*" This was the first of many healing miracles done in the name of the Risen Lord. Miracles that attracted many converts in the early church and led to its expansion. The lame man's leaping for joy (in fulfillment of Isaiah 35:6) and his words of praise become a model for salvation in Christ's name. What a better way to celebrate our salvation in the name of Jesus Christ than to jump for joy and praise God's name! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!