

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:
⁹ If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹ This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ ¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Text: Acts 4:8-12 A 4-15-18 1 John 1:1-2:2 Luke 24:36-49 Psalm 118 Resp. Ps.: 98
Hymns: 188, 764, 207 (1-4), 207 (5-6)

FORGIVEN, AND CALLED TO SERVE

Dear fellow believers in the living Christ,

Last Sunday we heard about Peter’s miraculous healing of a lame man, enabling him to walk. Peter told everyone there he had healed the man by the power of Jesus Christ (Ac. 3:1f.). Peter and John, who was with him, spoke to the people about Jesus and how He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Savior. The result was that “*many of those who heard the Word believed, about five thousand ... men,*” not counting women and children (Ac. 4:4).

This took place only a few months after Jesus’ resurrection. Just after Jesus died His followers were depressed and confused and afraid. Then He rose from the dead and appeared to them and talked to them and let them touch Him, letting them know that He’s alive again. He explained to them how the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied His death and resurrection, and He “*opened their minds*” to understand it and believe it (Lk. 24; etc.). Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on His disciples on Pentecost and afterwards. As He did with Peter and the lame man, Jesus enabled His disciples to work great miracles of healing. He gave them many opportunities to witness to people, and let them see thousands and thousands of people come to faith in Him. In all these ways Jesus very powerfully strengthened His disciples’ faith.

Just before our text we’re told that many of the Jewish leaders became “*greatly disturbed that the disciples taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*” The Jewish leaders thought that with Jesus dead His following would die out, too. But Christ’s Church was very much alive, and growing rapidly!

Peter and John were taken into custody. The Bible says that the Jewish “*rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, ... and ... many of the family of the high priest were gathered together at Jerusalem.*” It was the Jewish Sanhedrin, the same group that

had put Jesus on trial and condemned Him to death only a few months before. Now they made Peter and John stand before them putting them on trial. Talk about pressure!

Referring to Peter's miracle of healing the lame man the Jewish leaders demanded, *"By what power or name have you done this?"* In the original text "you" and "this" are emphasized, showing the absolute contempt of the Jewish leaders for Jesus and His followers: *"You"* followers of Jesus did *"this."* The Bible informs us that the man Peter had healed was over 40 years old when he could walk for the first time in his life (Ac. 3:2; 4:20). Yet in their hatred and contempt the Jewish leaders refused to even talk about it, dismissing it as *"this"* thing that Peter did.

Jesus had told His disciples, *"They will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. ... Do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit"* (Mk. 13:9, 11).

Our text begins, *"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to [the Sanhedrin], '...let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified' (and Peter emphasizes "you" in the original), 'whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.'"* The Holy Spirit had changed Peter from the man who cursed and swore that he didn't even know Jesus, to the man on trial before the Jewish High Court, confronting them with crucifying Jesus, and bearing powerful witness to them about Him.

Peter had denied Jesus. When we look at the word *"deny"* in the original and how it's used in other passages in the New Testament it's very probable that Peter didn't simply deny Jesus in weakness of faith, but in unbelief. After Peter's denial, he wept bitter tears of repentance (Mt. 26:75). After His resurrection Jesus reminded Peter of his denial, and assured Peter He had forgiven him. Jesus reaffirmed Peter in his calling as His apostle, telling Peter, *"Feed My lambs. ... Tend My sheep. ... Feed My sheep. ... Follow Me"* (Jn. 21:15–19).

Judas could have been forgiven, if he would have asked Jesus to forgive him. Judas' betrayal of Jesus was monstrous. Judas' betrayal and the hatred of Jesus' enemies brought about His death. But the real reason Jesus died was for Judas' sins, for the sins of Jesus' enemies, for Peter's sins, for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (Jn. 3:16–17).

On the cross Jesus had prayed for His enemies, *“Father forgive them.”* Now Jesus gave them the opportunity to hear again the truth about Him through Peter. Speaking of Jesus Peter told them, *“This is the ‘stone which was rejected’”* (literally in the original, *“the ‘stone which was utterly despised/made of no account/treated with contempt’”*) *‘by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’*” Peter quoted a prophecy of the Messiah from the 118th Psalm, showing the Jewish leaders that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah. The Psalm actually says, *“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by the builders....’”* Peter changed it to *“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders,’”* confronting the Jewish leaders with the truth that God’s Old Testament prophecy was directed at them. As the leaders of God’s people they should have been building His house – His Church. But *“they”* had *“utterly despised”* and *“rejected”* God’s chosen Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. Peter told them, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. No one should look for any other Savior than Jesus.

Jesus hadn’t given up on the Jewish people, and He hadn’t given up on their leaders. Not long after our text took place we read, *“The Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (Ac. 6:7). Certainly there were those among them who had also agreed to Jesus’ crucifixion, and yet Jesus in His grace saved them and forgave all their sins.

“Where sin abounded,” Scripture assures us, *“grace abounded much more”* (Ro. 5:20b). Jesus doesn’t ignore or excuse our sins, but He does forgive them. Like Peter who denied Jesus, maybe there’s something we’ve done, something in our past, that really troubles us. Sometimes the weight of our sinfulness and our sins in general make us feel very unworthy of Jesus’ forgiveness. Jesus says, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Mk. 2:17). Those who refuse to see their sin feel no need for Jesus’ forgiveness. It’s those who know they are sinners and come to Jesus in repentance whom He forgives. After Jesus converted him Paul said, *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”* (1 Tim. 1:15).

At Jesus’ empty tomb on the first Easter morning the angel told the women, *“He is risen! He is not here. ... Go tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him....”* (Mk. 16:6b-7). After he denied Jesus, Peter had no opportunity to talk to Jesus before He was crucified. After Jesus rose again He had His angel mention Peter by name to let Peter know that Jesus had forgiven him, and that he was still Jesus’ disciple. Peter spent the rest of his life serving Jesus and assuring repentant sinners that Jesus died for their sins, too.

Paul says, *“The ... God of all comfort ... comforts us..., that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”* (2 Cor.

1:3-4). Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Jesus' resurrection guarantees that our sins are forgiven. Jesus is with us. He gives us His Holy Spirit who strengthens our faith. He calls us to be His witnesses – speaking to others about sin and God's grace, assuring repentant sinners that just as Jesus forgives us so He forgives them, too.

God of grace and God of glory, On Your people pour Your power;
Crown Your ancient Church's story; Bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom; Grant us courage For the facing of this hour,
For the facing of this hour.

Save us from weak resignation To the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of Your salvation Be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, Serving You whom we adore,
Serving You whom we adore. Amen. (#764:1, 4)