

2015_04_26 Good Shepherd
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Good Shepherd is Known by His Power to Give Life

Acts 4:1-12

INI

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Acts 4:1–12

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, ²being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

⁵And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰let 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. ¹¹This is the *‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’* ¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

The Good Shepherd is Known by His Power to Give Life

1. He gives life to the man who was lame
2. He gives life to those who hear His word
3. He gives life to those who testify to His name

In Jesus name, dear fellow children of God,

I recently was listening to a speech in which the speaker made the following illustration:

He thought it was a circle. She thought it was a triangle. They argued and argued, but it turned out they were both right. You see, the object they were looking at was a cone. From above, he thought it was a circle. From the side, she thought it was a triangle. They argued and argued about it, but it turns out neither was wrong. It turns out, they were both right.

He went on to suggest that perhaps all religions are right. They are all looking at the same thing, only from different perspectives. They all have the same underlying truths such as love for your neighbor, they are just looking at it from different angles. They argue and argue, but what if they are all right? What if they all come from the same Spirit? And he claims to be a Christian.

This is a product of American westernized postmodern thinking: The only absolute is that there can be absolutely no absolutes. And they expect you to respond, “you’re absolutely right!”

This is at the very core, a first commandment question. You shall have no other gods. Sounds kind of absolute doesn’t it?

In his book, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, D. A. Carson says this: Christians are not saved by their beliefs about God, regardless of whether or not they are true. Their salvation depends entirely on the claim that these beliefs are founded on something that is absolutely true.

This is at the very core of the 1st commandment. You shall have no other gods. Absolutely. And it is at the core of our faith. That Jesus is not just a cone to be looked at from so many different angles, each describing him in whatever religious terms and confessions a person likes – he is not just a cone; he is the cornerstone.

As Peter proclaims: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

And the reason we can make such a claim is based fundamentally on Jesus’ death and resurrection. So the Good Shepherd lays down his life and raises it up again. And the sheep hear his voice and follow him. The Good Shepherd is known by His power to give life.

1. He gives life to the man who was lame

The political - religious majority in Israel didn't sound that much different than the majority of political - religious leadership today.

You see the Sadducees were the more liberal minded of the religious orders in Judaism. They controlled the majority view of the Jewish Council – a view which rejected any notion of miracles, angels, and especially resurrection. So when these apostles are preaching a resurrection of the dead and stirring up the people with talk of supposed miracles, when they hear rumors of paralyzed beggar now running, leaping, praising God in the Temple, they must investigate. They take Peter and the others into custody. “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

It was the same question that was asked of Jesus in John chapters 9 and 10. By what power; in whose name – these were questions of authority; authenticity; these were 1st commandment questions. When Jesus had opened the eyes of a man who was blind from birth, they had to investigate. “By what power, by whose name?” Perhaps this is of the devil. He has a demon and has spoken blasphemy.

But Jesus responds: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hired hand, who is merely there for a paycheck; he has no business defending the sheep, but runs away when danger is near. I am the good shepherd and I know My sheep. And my sheep know me. For I lay down my life for them. I lay down my life that I may raise it up again. This command I have receive from my father.”

This is why they are on trial. The idea that God would bring forth life with just a word of his voice; that God would raise up the one whom they had just sentenced to death, crucified, and buried with just a breath of his mouth; that this Jesus would claim exclusive rights to life in all its complexities and beauty and with just one word, empower Peter to heal this man who had been paralyzed from birth – well, to the Sadducees, its absolutely cannot be.

Peter responds: “Rulers and elders of Israel, You judge us for something good; therefore let it be known that the reason this man is standing here whole, is because of Jesus. By the name of Jesus this has happened. Jesus the Christ - whom you crucified, whom God raise from the dead. Jesus, the chief cornerstone of all that God would create, work, and build and there is salvation in no other.”

Sounds kind of absolute. But this is how the Good Shepherd is known. As the only one who has power to give life. The one who has laid down his life for the sheep, and raises

it up again, so that he can now give life to the sheep. And he demonstrates his power and life by healing this man who was lame.

2. He gives life to those who hear His word

He gives life. He claims exclusive rights to life. And this miracle is his demonstration. A demonstration that He is the Good Shepherd. One with the power to give life with a word of his mouth. For he gives life to all who hear His word.

The miracle is not enough. The miracles of Christ were never intended to convert people. Mark writes at the end of his gospel that as the disciples went out, the Lord was with them, confirming the word through the accompanying signs. The signs were meant to accomplish this purpose – to confirm the word. To make the truth claims of God sure and certain and give Christianity authenticity. The people weren't converted because they saw the healing –

4 ... many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

You are not saved by beliefs about God regardless of whether or not they are actually true, your salvation depends entirely on these words of God being true. You are saved because it is true that your Good Shepherd has laid down his life for you.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.” (John 10:11–14).

What makes Jesus more than just a cone is that he cannot be viewed from any other side, or in any other way than the one truth of His word. He has laid down his life and raised it up again. His death and resurrection have declared him the Son of God with power. And this power gives you life. God will not build the foundation for your salvation and His church on a cone. Rather he has built it on the only sure footing: the cornerstone.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

3. He gives life to those who testify to His name

This is what changed us from doubts and denials, to truth and testimony. For we hear his voice. Alive and living. This has given Jesus exclusive rights to life in all its bounty and beauty, in all its corruption and complexity, in all its trials and tribulations. And the resurrection gives Jesus all power to give life, and sustain us in His life as we testify to His name.

With just a word, Peter was changed from doubts and denials, to truth and testimony. It was the truth of God's word as revealed in the resurrection that changed Peter from fearful denial to faithful testimony.

Could this be the same Peter? The Peter who stood in the courtyard of the High Priest, the same High Priest he stands before in our text? The Peter who was only interested in saving his own skin rather than joining his Savior. The Peter who was filled with doubts and denials? He now stands before the same council that put Jesus to death for claiming to be the Christ and says this:

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.

The Good Shepherd is known by his power to give life.

Christians are on trial. When someone claims that perhaps all religions are right, that whether you call it a cone or a triangle, no one is really wrong – Christians are on trial. The consequences for speaking up can be great. Even, “anti-science.” Even, “anti-freedom.” Even, “anti-American.”

The idea that God would bring forth life in all its bounty and beauty in just six days and do it with just a word of his voice or that God would raise up a human being from the dust of the ground and give him life with just a breath of his mouth – well, it seems anti-science.

The idea that God would define life as beginning at conception, or that God would claim exclusive rights to this thing called life, our own life, the lives of others, eternal life – well, it seems anti-freedom.

The idea that God would give the world over to sin and death and the condemnation of hell, knowingly forfeiting the goodness of his creation and binding us under his law, then offer His own Son into that curse as the only means of redemption for all people, robbing us of our claim to define morality and to claim any ability to fix this problem, and that those who believe this truth have exclusive access to the only true God and all other religions and ways of faith will be destroyed in hell – well, it seems anti-American.

The consequences for speaking up can be great. But the consequences for not speaking up can be even greater.

Christians are on trial and it is only by the power that Jesus gives in His word and resurrection that we are changed from doubts and denials, to truth and testimony. For God has forgiven your doubts. He has put away your denials. Christ knows your sheepish ways. And with the staff of His Word, he leads you to the still waters of baptism, assuring you of your identity. Forgiven, washed, cleansed, at rest. There is no threat, not political, not social, that can endanger you. Even though you should walk through the valley of darkness, you need fear nothing.

Christians are on trial. And our testimony to issues of creation, marriage, life, salvation – these matter. We cannot sheepishly wander off from the voice of our Shepherd; for the jaws of wolves are open all around. We cannot rely on a hireling, one who is only in it for the outward results. No matter how famous or popular – a political leader, religious leader, best selling author, prestigious journalist, popular opinion – we cannot rely on those who are hired hands. The only voice that we can trust is that of the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. He is known by His power to give life.

Sometimes a cone is just a cone. Don't bother getting caught up in the argument; rather remain close to your Shepherd. Join Peter on trial, calling back those who wander. For God has filled us with His Holy Spirit. So that those standing by must see that there is salvation in no other – Jesus has exclusive rights to life in all its bounty and beauty; in all its corruption and complexity, in all its trials and tribulations. And the resurrection gives Jesus all power to give life. Perhaps those around you will see the uncertainty of building their hopes of eternal life on a cone and they will discover the only foundation that can last – the cornerstone. For there is salvation in no other.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.