

**Texts: Acts 4:1-21**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 (communion and baptisms)**

**Brightons Parish Church**

**In the portion of Acts** that leads up to today's reading, Peter healed a lame man at the temple and used the opportunity to speak to the people gathered there. In that moment, Peter sought to teach that not only was healing available in the name of Jesus, but that in Jesus "the resurrection of the dead" was secured as well (4v2).

**And then, for the first time** in the book of Acts, opposition arises against the early church and people seek to quash the Good News that is being shared. In this instance the antagonists are the Sadducees.

For, you see, the Sadducees did not believe in the Resurrection, and so they were understandably disturbed with what the apostles were saying:

**Peter and John were refuting one of the Sadducees' fundamental beliefs, threatening their authority, their reputation, their lives. So, the Sadducees to respond, exerting their power over the Temple grounds, and arresting Peter and John.**

**But rather than be filled with fear for their lives, or silenced through intimidation, the apostles exemplify an astonishing courage – here in the heart of the political and religious centre of the nation, in front of the most powerful Jewish leaders, are a pair of upstart fishermen. Yet, here they are, unwavering, uncompromising – as bold as brass, as brave as a lion – when they should be anything but this. So, why? Why are Peter and John like this? What it is that fuels such conviction and passion?**

**Peter says, 'it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead,**

that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’ (Acts 4:10-12)

Bold as brass doesn’t even really cover it! **I want to make three** brief points today.

**Firstly, Jesus** is the cornerstone given by God. Peter said that ‘Jesus is “the stone...which has become the cornerstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind.’

**In the ancient world,** the cornerstone was the most important stone in the building. It set the level, angle, and outer dimensions of the building. It had to be level and

**squared true (absolutely vertical) so that all the other stones could be set from it. If it were not level, then as the walls of the building were erected, they would lean and fall. No stone was more important than the cornerstone because the integrity of the whole structure depended on the cornerstone.**

**The largest stone on the present Temple Mount platform measures 45 feet by 11 feet by 16-1/2 feet. It is a huge stone. 45 feet long—that is from....to.... A long way. And then it rises 11 feet, and it is 16-1/2 feet broad. That is from...to...It weighs nearly 600 tonnes. They were so very big because they were so very significant.**

**These stones were so big that they did not need mortar. They were heavy and would not move. It is also why they**

lasted for so long—because they were built of the strongest, biggest stones.

**But Peter is not talking about** a physical building, for he said, ‘Jesus [the man] is “the stone...[and]...Salvation is found in no one else.’ So what Peter means here is that Jesus, as the cornerstone, ensures salvation, for just as the building does not even exist without the chief cornerstone, salvation does not either – Jesus is the cornerstone, He ensures salvation, He is the means, He is what gives stability and certainty, and He will never change.

What has led Peter to this conviction? **We read earlier** in Acts these words of Peter: ‘Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and

**signs...This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.'** (Acts 2:22-24)

**In Jesus, Peter sees God's plan of salvation, that on the Cross Jesus paid the penalty of sin, of humanity's waywardness and darkness. But not only that, He rose again, triumphing over death and the grave, proving that only in Jesus is salvation in the fullest sense secured – that reconciliation with God is made available, and one day there will be a new creation, and the shadow of the valley of death will be no more, and God's dwelling-place will be among His people, and He will dwell with them such**

**that every tear will be wiped from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away, for in Jesus, all things will have been made new.**

**This glorious vision of Jesus** is what the apostles have come to know and experience. They see in Jesus the Saviour of the world and that no one else is His equal. No other religious teacher came to earth as God's only Son, accredited by God Himself; no other religious teacher has died for humanity's sins and been vindicated in rising from the dead. Jesus has no equal. He is the cornerstone of salvation given by God. There is no other name and none is needed, for this cornerstone will not be moved, cannot be moved, is sure and steadfast, is true and perfect and fully trustworthy. And to Him, the apostles hold fast and proclaim.

**But not only is Jesus** the cornerstone given by God, Jesus is the cornerstone we each need. And that can seem a bold, even arrogant, and some of you have had religion rammed down your throat, and you feel it again, even now. Others of you, I know, look on your TVs at the horrors inflicted upon this world in the name of religion, and you say “enough, no more, not in my name.”

I see where you are coming from, and my heart is broken that you experienced that form of Christianity, and I’m grieved that covetousness, pride, ambition has led to the corruption of Christianity for so long and in so many places and ways. But in this moment, I ask you to hear me afresh – to see that the way of Jesus, is self-giving love, of power given up for the benefit of others, for the life of Jesus was given to convey the love of God for you.

**So, please hear me afresh. We each need Jesus. We each need Him as the cornerstone of our own lives. And I'm convinced of that because I know we are all broken. None of us leads the perfect life, we each hurt and cause hurt, we each stumble and fail, we each are careless with our words and negligent in our actions. We each have a darkness inside, my friends, and it's there in me too, a darkness I can't begin to comprehend its true depth, a darkness, that if I'm honest, I'd rather you didn't see, didn't acknowledge, didn't experience. But it is there,...**

**and it is there in each of us. And if anything confirmed that we need a Saviour, it is that darkness, and the reality that the darkness is there in each of us.**

**When Jesus came, He came saying, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' He came to call us back into relationship with God, through Himself, through His death on the Cross for our darkness, and through His resurrection to the life we need and long for. We're all ill, we all have a darkness, and no other name under heaven has been given to mankind by which we must, by which we can, be saved and brought into the light, and life, of God's kingdom.**

**So, we each need Jesus, we each need the salvation that He offers – of a renewed relationship with God and of certain hope that the darkness will not win the day, a hope you can begin to experience even now.**

**So, Jesus is the cornerstone given by God; Jesus is the cornerstone we each need; and finally, Jesus is the cornerstone we must profess. Peter and John knew whom Jesus was, and of their need for Him and His sufficiency to meet that need, and so they profess this, wherever, whenever, in front of whomever, with the boldness of a lion. And they will refuse to listen to any voice, to heed any command, that would seek to deter them from their call, for Jesus said to them, ‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ (Acts 1:8)**

**These words were not just said to Peter and John, but to all the disciples, and it is a charge and calling given to every disciple of Christ. In our membership promises of this denomination we promise that depending on the**

**grace of God, to profess publicly our loyalty to Jesus Christ.**

**So, to my brothers and sisters here today, to those who call themselves Christian, who claim membership of His Church and of this congregation, who seek access to this very table – whose voice will you listen to? **H.G. Wells once said**, “The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbours sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God.” Is that true of us friends?**

**Do we allow our allegiance to Jesus to be swayed by the voice of neighbour, family, employer, social group, convention, or even our own inner voice?**

**I hear stories of congregations thriving and of people coming to faith and of the kingdom of God breaking into this world in ways you could never imagine – but the people that see it, the congregations that experience it, are the ones in whom allegiance is given to Jesus first and forever, who have Jesus alone as their cornerstone and are ready and willing to help others see that of Jesus too.**

**I pray that we might be such a people. May it be so.  
Amen.**