

# Salvation in no one else

Acts 4:5-13

I want to talk about the line in the story today when Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addresses the religious leaders of his day, and informs them that Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified, was raised from the dead by God, and then makes the very bold claim that there is “Salvation in no one else”.

I want us to think about this bold statement of Peter’s because it lies at the heart of our faith.

And just as in Peter’s day, this claim is not supported by, but goes against that which sometimes takes the name “religion”.

Because, you see, religion at its worst, is a system of hierarchy,  
about who belongs and who does not,  
about who keeps the rules and who does not  
about who has power and who does not.

It might use the language of God and good conduct, and respectability and morality,  
But such religion actually becomes deeply harmful to us.

It inflates our pride

It encourages us to turn our noses up at those who do not belong

And it does not enable us to come to know and live truly loving lives.

Instead of this false religion, Peter tells us that through Jesus we come to know something else, which he calls “salvation”.

Salvation means a broad range of things.

In the passage which we read, it is quite clear that salvation means healing.

The whole reason for this dispute is that Peter and John have healed a man who was sick, and it is clear that Peter sees this as a form of salvation.

Another common form of salvation which the New Testament talks about is salvation from our sins, our faults, and above all our disordered relationship with God. We were made for glory, and yet we know all too well how badly we fall short. Being restored to friendship, love even, of God, is what the New Testament calls salvation.

Another very biblical idea of salvation is of being saved from our enemies. We nice respectable people do not like to think of ourselves as having enemies, but our enemies are often those faceless systems which make the poor poorer, which distort our relationships, which leave us feeling powerless or persecuted. It may be a bit of a downer to say this, but we have more enemies than we think. And the New Testament goes further than this to say we have spiritual enemies, even the devil is something that Jesus talks about. Those of you who have Gaelic roots and heritage will not need much convincing about the darker forces which persecute us. I often think that jealousy is one of the devil's favourite tactics, so if you were prone to bouts of jealousy, then that may have darker spiritual roots, and may point you to some of your enemies.

Those are at least three things which the Bible says we need saved from – the infirmity of our bodies which really is a sign of death, our sin, and our enemies.

And Peter makes the bold claim that being saved, that receiving salvation, happens through Jesus Christ – the one who was crucified and was raised.

Religion cannot save us.

But somehow Jesus can.

And we come to know this power of Jesus through faith, or to use another word which in the Bible means the same thing,

We come to know this power of Jesus through *TRUST*.

Trusting in Jesus brings us to the salvation of Jesus.

This is actually a mystery, and I want to give two images which point us to this mystery, to parables, and then I want to apply this to all of our lives.

The mystery of salvation in Christ is something that the New Testament says quite a lot about.

It is actually something that Christian thinkers have said a lot about over the centuries.

How is that the death and resurrection of one man, on Jerusalem cross 2000 years ago, Can effect me now.

How can this one event, the death and resurrection of Jesus, travel across distance and across time, so that it has a very direct effect on me.

This is a mystery, and almost pondering this mystery is part of the delight, but I want to give two images which might help us.

The first image comes from the novel, the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, by CS Lewis.

You will recall in that in the magical and mystical land of Narnia

It is always winter and never Christmas

The land sits under the rule of the witch

And the sons of Adam, alongside the whole land are captured in this cruel spell.

The mistake belongs to the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve,

And the white witch knows that somehow they have pledged their allegiance to her.

However, the true king, Aslan steps forward in their place,

And instead of the sons of Adam, allows himself to be killed on the stone table by the White Witch,.

However, in doing this, in killing one his pure,  
Aslan enacts what is called “Deep Magic” which undoes the curse of the White Witch  
And allows the whole of Narnia to become unfrozen, to be brought to life  
And to live free.

I always come back to that phrase in the story “Deep magic”

When Christ died, there was a deep magic at work, which undid the power of darkness  
over us, which paid the price which was ours, which undid the curse, which unde the  
powers of darkness and let us go free.

And our response to which we are called is to trust,  
To have faith  
In the one who gave himself up for us, who set us free.

The second parable comes from John Bell, and might be called the parable of the  
slimming club. I don’t know if you have ever belonged to a slimming club, and you might  
recognise some of what is spoken of here...

There was once a weightwatcher’s club in a certain city which you could only join if you  
were over twenty stone.

When it was established, the thirty or so participants agree on a some basic rules: they  
were going to be abjectly honest; they were going to admit the food they ate which they  
should have avoided and they were each going to try and to get to their target weight (a  
healthy weight for someone of their age and height) within six months. For every excess  
pound, offenders would pay a penalty of one pound.

They started with great enthusiasm.

But as the weeks went on, the willpower began to wane.

In the early days they would talk to each other seriously about their night excursions into the fridge in the kitchen or the box of Maltesers on the shelf at the foot of the bed, and savour the disapproval of each other's criticism.

But as the weeks went on, they still admitted what they got up to, but took it more casually and sometimes even joked about their misdemeanours.

The day of reckoning came, when after six months, they all stood on the scales and discovered how near or how far away they were from the ideal.

And when all the excess pounds of weight were added up, it was discovered that among them they would have to pay a combined penalty of around £2800.

They stood around, wondering who would be the first to pay his or her portion of the penalty. Nobody was keen to take the lead. Then into the room came a man they all knew, but who no one ever expected to see in their midst. He was the thinnest man in the neighbourhood. He knew them all and one by one he said their names:

“Alex, Jennifer, Marjory, Annette, Giles”,

And then with sad eyes... “have you no idea what you are doing to yourselves?”

And then he, a poor man, took out his wallet and emptied his life savings, £3000 into the kitty and went out.

Some people laughed at him

Some people called him a fool

And some people gave up over-eating for the rest of their lives.

When we talk about Jesus paying the price for our sins,

When we talk about Jesu purchasing our salvation

When we talk about Jesus dying *for* us

It is something like the picture of Aslan dying for Narnia  
Or something like that the story of weight watchers club  
Which we are pointing to.

And this comes with an invitation.

Will you trust.

Now this needs applied.

To trust is an inner movement of the human heart.

To say to God,

“I know I have fallen short

I believe you came

I believe you died for me

I believe you rose again

Would you save me,

Woud you save me from everything that harms me

Everything.

And I will follow you”.

And in this moment of trust

In this moment of vulnerability and of openness

Salvation comes to us

Through what CS Lewis called Deep Magic.

This does not mean that we will not doubt

Faith always brings doubt

Jesus knew that our faith was always small and faltering

But even the faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains

Let us ask God for the faith we need.

In the words of the man who spoke to Jesus

“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief”.

And faith always brings a sense that we are not worthy.

That faith and trust and salvation are something that other people receive

But not us.

Curiously there is a kind of double logic at work in Churches where we read that the religious people did not believe in Jesus, and were cut off from him,

Then curiously we are like them in the story,

By being religious, by being churchgoers, maybe we are the ones who do not get it

And so we continue in our sense of inadequacy, of not feeling that we believe.

In truth, it doesn't matter if we are convicted prisoner serving a life time sentence

Or the Moderator of the Church of Scotland

We will always find a way of imagining that salvation is not for us.

I find great heart in reading the people who responded to Jesus.

There were the sinners and tax-collectors and publicans who flocked to Jesus

And then in Acts, in chapter 6 verse 7, I love it when we are told that many priests came to faith...

So everyone – from tax-collectors, to publicans

Jews and non-Jews

Priests and centurions

Everyone got to respond with faith.

There will always be a voice which says – “not me” but actually,

You can learn to trust

It does include you

Trust him,

He will save you

From everything you need to be saved from

This is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to close with a word of prayer...

And you might want to say it for yourselves, it uses “I” and “me” because this is personal

“Dear God,

It’s me here

It’s me with all my doubts and all my questions

And all my sense that I am not good enough.

And some of this is because I have failed

And some of it is because I feel guilty when I shouldn’t

And to be honest I don’t always know the difference.

Would you forgive me I pray

Would you give me enough faith

Would you save me



Through Jesus who died on the cross

Through his gift

Through him dying in my place

Would you have save

And would you give an assurance that you have heard me

And that you have healed me

This I pray in the name of Jesus

AMEN”