

SERMON TITLE: "By the Name of Jesus"
SERMON TEXT: Acts 4:1-12
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: April 29, 2018, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

I'm glad we wear name tags in this church. I've been in churches where the members don't wear name tags, and I notice that the people don't mingle as easily. They only talk with people they know well because they're afraid that they might call someone by the wrong name. They don't want to offend, and they don't want to feel embarrassed. So it's easier for them just to avoid anyone whose name doesn't roll off the tip of the tongue. And pretty soon, the whole church seems to be divided up into small little cliques. Here at First UMC, we are a much friendlier group, in large part, I think, because, by wearing name tags, we're not afraid of saying the wrong name or coming up blank.

Names are important. One author has put it this way:

Suppose [you're] inside a crowded place, say a stadium or a concert, with thousands of people talking, laughing, and screaming at the same time. In [those] situations, [we're] trained to filter that external noise, so that we can focus on what our friends are saying nearby. Our brain is extremely powerful, and it does that [filtering] job quite effectively.

There is one word, however, that would [pass "through your filters" and] catch your attention even if it was uttered by someone far away. [It's] your name.¹

Dale Carnegie, the guy who wrote books and gave speeches about *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, said that "A person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language."² Carnegie taught that anyone who wanted to gain power and authority should learn and use people's names.

Names have always been important—sometimes our names, sometimes someone else's name. We all know of famous people, who by their name were able to gain attention for themselves or a cause.

In the Bible story from Acts 4, we see that the first-century Jewish leaders demanded that Peter and John tell them by what power or name they were healing and preaching. The Jewish authorities didn't believe that Peter and John had that ability all by themselves. Indeed they didn't, agreed the apostles. What they accomplished was done, in fact, by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Today, what good we experience and share with others is also accomplished in and through Jesus' name. So let's look more closely at this Bible story and see what is possible by the name of Jesus.

1—WE ARE RESURRECTED

The first possibility we notice is that, by the name of Jesus, we are resurrected. Acts chapter two tells how the disciples finally got up the courage to begin preaching that God had raised Jesus from the dead. But by Acts chapter four, we find that the disciples' message had developed further. Verses one and two tell us that the Jewish priests, captain of the temple, and Sadducees were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people that, by the name of Jesus, they also could participate in the resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection of the dead wasn't a new idea. Jewish people had been discussing the idea of resurrection for several centuries. The earliest instances of resurrection language expressed the hope of renewal and restoration for the nation of Israel, following the Babylonian exile. Later, under the influence of the Persians and Greeks, some of the Jewish people began to believe in a personal resurrection. The Sadducees still denied the idea of resurrection, but for the Pharisees and other Jewish people, it was a real hope. They believed that some day, when the Messiah came, the age of resurrection would begin.

What was new about the apostles' message was that they were associating the resurrection with Jesus. By proclaiming Jesus as the risen Messiah, the apostles were preaching that the age of resurrection had already begun. They were giving resurrection a new immediacy and making it much

more relevant. They were teaching that the resurrection was beginning now for all who believed in Jesus' name.

We who have come to faith in and through the Christian tradition find great comfort in the belief that we too will rise to eternal life with Jesus. When a loved one dies, we have a peace in our hearts because we trust that he or she has moved quickly through death into the new life of the resurrection. No waiting is necessary. The Messiah has already come. By the name of Jesus, we are resurrected.

2—WE ARE HEALED

According to the story in Acts, a second possibility of believing in Christ is that, by the name of Jesus, we are healed. Acts chapter 3 tells us that, one day when Peter and John went to the temple to pray, a crippled man begged them to give him some money. Peter answered him, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." Instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong and he jumped up and began praising God. In Acts chapter 4, Peter and John were explaining to the Jewish authorities that they healed the crippled man by the name of Jesus.

In other words, there's more than one way to be lifted up to new life. After we die, we're made whole in the resurrection. That's a kind of ultimate healing. But even before we die, we can receive new life for our bodies and spirits through the healing power of Jesus' name.

I realize that healing is a difficult subject. The fact that some people never receive the kind of healing they desire and pray for is a source of confusion and doubt for many. But, in spite of those questions, we Christians persist in believing that Jesus and his disciples did bring healing to many people, and that the miracles of Christ are still possible today. I would guess that nearly everyone here can name someone you know who believes that Jesus brought them some kind of healing. By the name of Jesus, people have received miraculous cures and extended life. By the name of Jesus, churches have

built hospitals that cared for the sick and the poor. By the name of Jesus, Christians have sent medical missionaries to the farthest reaches of the world. By the name of Jesus, we offer prayers, send get well cards, make phone calls, and take casseroles and pots of soup to the sick. By the name of Jesus, men and women, boys and girls, the old and the young have felt the assurance that God was on their side, giving strength and peace.

3—WE ARE SAVED

By the name of Jesus, we are resurrected and healed. By the name of Jesus, we are also saved. In Acts 4:12, Peter stated that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” Over the centuries, this verse has often been interpreted in a negative and exclusive way to condemn persons of other major religions and to try to persuade, or even force, conversions to the Christian faith. The Crusades of the Middle Ages and later Christian “holy” wars and genocidal actions were carried out, at least partly, with this verse in mind.

I’m confident we don’t need to interpret it that way. When Jesus gave the great commission, he didn’t say, “Go ye, therefore, into all the nations and tell them that they must convert or die.” Jesus said we are supposed to “make disciples,” and that, to me, means we have a responsibility to witness to the positive truth that we have found Jesus to be a wonderful, graceful, and amazing source of salvation. We can demonstrate with our generosity, our kindness, our hopefulness, and our forgiving spirit that we have benefited in profound ways from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We can tell how Jesus helps us overcome temptation and inspires us to do what’s right. We can relate to our family members, our neighbors, and our co-workers in healthy ways because our first love, our ultimate priority, and our bedrock assurance is the God who washes away our sin and fills us with the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s the strength, wisdom, and appeal of Christian faith. Praise the Lord! By the name of Jesus, we are saved.

CONCLUSION

Earlier this week, I was reading a United Methodist news source. One of the stories was about a journalist in Alabama who just won a Pulitzer Prize for his newspaper commentaries. John Archibold was in the United Methodist news because he is a member of the Highlands United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and because he is the “son, nephew, grandson, and great grandson of Methodist pastors.”³ That means his family name is well known in United Methodist circles.

Reading that article also got me to wondering about Pulitzer Prizes. So I did a little research. The prize was established in 1917. The money for the awards was first designated by the will of a Hungarian-born American named Joseph Pulitzer. Pulitzer “made his fortune as a newspaper publisher,”⁴ and he wanted to make sure good journalism continued. Thus, he gave his money to Columbia University to launch a journalism school and establish the Prize. Much like an Academy Award or Nobel Prize, a Pulitzer Prize is a great honor. Even in a time when newspapers are shutting down under financial pressure, and our own local *Standard-Examiner* has just been sold, it’s still a very great achievement to win the admiration, respect, and appreciation of professional colleagues, and to receive the prize that comes by the name of Joseph Pulitzer.

We may not win a prize like that, but we who are followers of Christ have the opportunity to receive many other great benefits and possibilities. We are resurrected, we are healed, and we are saved by the name of Jesus.

¹ Daniel Scocco, at <https://www.dailyblogtips.com/on-the-importance-of-addressing-people-by-their-names/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/career-coach-the-power-of-using-a-name/2014/01/10/8ca03da0-787e-11e3-8963-b4b654bcc9b2_story.html?utm_term=.ee7691d9e440

³UMNS Weekly Digest, April 27, 2018.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize