

In the Gospel of Luke we read these words

Of Jesus to his disciples: **When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.'**

Luke 12:11-12

Well, in today's reading Jesus' disciples are in this sort of situation

They have been arrested, and they are before

The rulers of the people and the elders.

They have not been anxious about how to defend themselves

Or what they are to say

So when they stand as accused, and when they are cross examined

What does the Holy Spirit teach them to say?

What will their word be about?

Well, today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's word:

Although we are culpable, although we share in the blame

For the death of the Lord Jesus

Our hope of healing, our salvation comes from him,

Because God has raised him from the dead

And given us the name 'Jesus' to call on in our need

So that we may share in his risen life.

Before we get into today's text let's just remind ourselves

About what has happened in Acts so far:

Peter has used Jesus' name to heal a man lame from birth.

This is what we read back in chapter 3: **One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, '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.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:1-10**

So: Peter and John did not have the financial resources
To give the man what he *expected* to receive,
But they did have *the name of Jesus*,
The name of the one who was risen from the dead,
And the power of the Jesus' resurrection was seen
In the healing of the man.

Now as the narrative unfolds we read
That the people hear the news, and rush to where the apostles are.
Peter then proclaims that the healing
Was not done though his own power or piety,
But by God though his servant, Jesus.
More than this, Peter also proclaims that the crowds themselves
Bear responsibility for Jesus' death –
That it is was they who rejected and killed the author of life
While asking a murderer to be given to them.
But, St Peter says, they acted in ignorance,
And in turning now to God they can have their sins wiped out.

This brings us to the *direct context* for today's reading.

Listen: **While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.**

Now, it says that the priest, the captain of the temple,
And the Sadducees were *much annoyed*. Why? What annoyed them?
This is why: **because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus *there is the resurrection of the dead*.**

Sometimes we can get the idea that all the Jewish people
Back in the days of Jesus and the apostles
Believed in the resurrection of the dead in general,
But not the resurrection of Jesus in particular.
But the reality is more complicated.

So, for example, back in Luke we read this about the Sadducees: **Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus] and asked him a question, Luke 20:27**

They asked him a cheeky hypothetical
About the woman who married seven husbands.

You may remember that Jesus out them in their place when he said: **[The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob] is God not of the dead, but of the living.** Luke 20:37-30

Now here we are in Acts, and the resurrection is not presented
As a theological idea to be debated using hypotheticals,
But as something that has happened with Jesus of Nazareth,
And something that will happen with those
Who call on his name.
The Sadducees and their allies do not like it.

And this brings us to today's reading: **The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'**

Here are the apostles where Jesus said they would be:
Brought before the rulers, and cross examined.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say

And this is what we read: **Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.'**

Notice first of all that Peter focuses on the good deed,
On the healing of the man born lame.

It seems to me that there is a kind of rebuke in this:

A miraculous healing has occurred, but the chief concern

Of those in power appears to be keeping their power –

Of making sure that their narrative – that there is no resurrection –

Goes unchallenged.

But St Peter does not compromise on his teaching

And, in a boldness that was absent when Jesus was arrested,

Holds the leaders also accountable for Jesus' death.

Remember, he told them: **this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.**

The Holy Spirit has taught the apostles to proclaim a message

Of repentance – of acknowledging culpability for Jesus' death,

And of forgiveness of sins in the name

Of the one whom God raised from the dead, in the name of Jesus.

In our own Lutheran tradition we are well aware that each one of us
Is responsible for Jesus' death: that it was *our* sin
That lead to his suffering on the cross.
And so, we don't blame the Romans or the Jews or anyone else,
Rather we confess our own culpability, our own blameworthiness
For what happened to Jesus.

This is how St Peter goes on: **This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone."**

Here St Peter, in quoting Psalm 118,

Is going back to what Jesus had taught the chief priests

And the scribes and the elders in the temple:

But [Jesus] looked at them and said, 'What then does this text mean:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' Luke 20:17-18

One way to think about this is to consider

The just punishment that should break us, that should fall on us

For our complicity in the death of Christ.

This can be very helpful to consider when we are angry at others,

And want to see them condemned for what they have done.

Do we want to be judged by our own strict standards

When we should be broken, should be crushed,

For what we have done to others, to Jesus?

But more than this, St Peter proclaims a hope

To free us from fear, and to give us a share

In the power of the resurrection of Christ into new life.

This is what St Peter says: **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'**

The name Jesus means 'The Lord saves'

And God has given this name not just to the Jewish people,

But to all people, so that we may call on it

And receive the gift of healing and life from God.

The one who was put to death for our sins,

Who bore the penalty for our transgression,

Lives, and brings us the gift of peace with God.

So, let's call on his name, receive the gift of his Holy Spirit,

And experience the power of his resurrected life

As we glorify God by showing love for each other.

In Jesus' name. Amen.