



THE NEW SHOFAR

Psalm 116 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever...

It is better to take refuge in God than to trust in man

Easter 4

There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved (Acts 4).

This is quite a statement from Peter in our reading from Acts, one that today seems to be almost prophetic in terms of the world in which Christians today are forced to live and proclaim the Good News of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. So, what is Luke saying in recording these accounts of the early preaching of the apostles?

Firstly, the Greek has a definite article before the word *salvation* that is missing in the English translation. This raises the statement to a level beyond just the healing of the sick man. It is about ***the salvation***. Yes, in the Name of Jesus the sick man was physically healed but God is doing something far more enduring than restoring the man to health. By insisting on the power of the Name of Jesus, Peter is introducing the notion of the fulfilling of every hope expressed by the prophets, the unfolding of the divine promises made from the time of Abraham onwards. In Jesus the Messiah, men and women are restored, healed, forgiven, set free, given new meaning and purpose to their lives – that is, they are *saved*. This is ***the*** salvation of which Peter is speaking.

It was important for Peter the man to proclaim his own limitations – the limitations of all human endeavours to bring freedom and new life to the peoples of the world. This man is rejoicing in the restoration of his health but he will more than likely be sick again in the future and will most certainly die and go to his grave. If all Peter had to offer was the physical healing, then the gift was limited. Wonderful but limited.

The man here was crippled from the time of his birth and was forced to live by begging, a miserable life at best. His only hope in life was the chance of a coin in his begging dish. Then, along comes Peter. He does not offer him the material help asked of him. Rather he offers him (unconditionally) *Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. The result? ... *Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God*. He is a new man through his close encounter with God's Messiah. This is what ***the*** salvation of God guarantees. This is what Jesus came to offer men and women everywhere... our *walking and leaping and praising God*.

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It is the contrast Luke wants us to ponder: Life before Jesus compared to what life was like after engaging with the holy Name of Jesus.

Salvation is about a significant transformation of the way we live

Throughout the Bible, the word *salvation* has at its core the sense of being liberated from something – circumstances that straightjacket us, that limit our ability to fully live in this world as we were created to be living. Through *salvation* we are set free, unfettered. *Salvation* is applied to the actions of God in creation, to something God does for us, we creatures made in the divine image and likeness.

The Eastern Orthodox Church puts it well when it stresses that salvation comes about when a person entirely conforms his will and actions with God. They have a word for this – *theosis*. This describes the process of becoming at one with God. We are so aligned with the saving ways of God in the world through the way we live, think, plan, worship – exist. *Salvation* is a lifelong process ending only when we are raised from the grave to live eternally in the divine presence. In the words of St Athanasius (298-373 A.D.) *God became man that man might become God!* Outrageous but it is powerful biblical image...*You may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).*

Salvation is all about our willingness to be at one with God

Before we can be at one with God, the Bible teaches us the necessity of first of all emptying ourselves of all that clings to this world. While the things I think, say and do begin with *I/me*, we can never experience what salvation does for us. I love the daily prayer of St Ignatius Loyola on this...

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will. Thou hast given me all that I am and all that I possess: I surrender it all to Thee that Thou mayest dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me only Thy love and Thy grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will have no more to desire.

This is a prayer the saint makes asking God to take possession of him and for him to be able to possess God. Ignatius no longer wanted to live for himself but rather to live for the God who has taken him over. That is salvation.

Salvation is always being saved from something and saved for something

The very nature of the word salvation means there is some sort of threatening or deadly condition from which we must be rescued. What we are saved from are the consequences of our sins and the sins of the world. It does not mean we no longer sin, but that sin and evil no longer dominate our existence. In our turning to God in Christ, whatever power these things may have had over us is smashed. We are free.

With that freedom comes a new series of responsibilities. We are to so align ourselves with the ways of Jesus that the will of God is the only thing that truly matters for us. All we do we conform to the Way of God, a Way that is revealed to us in the way Jesus lived among us. Salvation is a Way made manifest in Love.

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