

April 21, 2024

Acts 4:1-12

“No Other Name!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was one of the most explosive political events of the 20th century. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power and destroyed the tradition of czarist rule. The Bolsheviks would later become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Before the Russian Revolution, Lenin had stated that “Everyone must be absolutely free to ... be an atheist, which every socialist is, as a rule.” He further said: “Complete separation of Church and State is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church.” Lenin insisted that “religion must be declared a private affair.” However, once Lenin and his Bolsheviks took over a decade later, they refused to tolerate religion at all, even as a private affair, because it conflicted with their sinful desires, their world view, and agenda.

Christianity was persecuted in Russia across the board. One may ask: what was the persecution of Lutherans like and what were its effects? In 1917, there were 1,828 Lutheran churches. In six years (1923) there were 160. In 1929, with the arrests of two pastors on Christmas and approximately thirty Sunday school teachers in Leningrad, the Lutheran Church began its final decline. Many saw the handwriting on the wall and began to melt away from the Lutheran Church. By 1939, all Christian churches would be closed (except for some Orthodox churches), its pastors imprisoned or executed.

What would your reaction be if something similar to this happened in your lifetime? Most would think that this would be a violation of our rights as American citizens. I suspect that many people in Russia thought something similar. But what are you going to do about it when you have little or no power and when the strength of those in charge is so great that they can destroy your life or make you disappear in a moment? This kind of thing is nothing new. It’s been going on since Cain killed Abel and it will never end until our blessed Jesus returns. Indeed, what would our reaction be?

Our first lesson for this Fourth Sunday of Easter records the following from Acts 4:1-3, “And as they [Peter and John] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, *greatly annoyed* because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.” What does it mean in the NT Greek to be “greatly annoyed?” It means that the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees were pained or worn out being troubled by what they were hearing. They were tired of hearing that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was labor intensive and painful for them and I can understand why since they knew the facts. They could not win with truth because they had chosen a lie and were now left with simply getting rid of the messengers of truth.

The light we bring in Christ touches the darkness and exposes it for what it is. The gospel of Christ has no meaning without the law and people do not want to acknowledge who they are and what they have done and what they deserve. What we are saying is true about the cross and empty tomb, and this will require a serious change in who unbelievers are and their world view and agenda. People love their evil desires and deeds and do not wish to give them up. Hostility grows when truth pushes back what is the preferred lie of the day. If you really want to get into the weeds on this matter then consider the words that Christ spoke to those who were hostile to him in John 8:43-45. Jesus says:

Why do you not understand what I say? *It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.* You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.*

Before our first reading for today Peter and John were confronted with a cripple at the gate of the temple, and Peter said to him in Acts 3:6, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the *name* of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Immediately the man got up, leaped and jumped and praised God. A great crowd gathered to listen. Peter preached and told the crowd that it was by the *name* of Jesus that the man was given perfect health in the presence of all. Indeed! It was by the *name* of Jesus who was dead but now alive! **No Other Name!** It was this name of Jesus that caused Peter and John to be dragged off to prison for the night.

Do you remember what the name "Jesus" means? Allow the angel to remind us of what was said to Joseph long ago when he discovered that Mary was with child and it was not his. We read in Matthew 1:19-21,

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and *you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*"

Amazing isn't it?! The unbelieving world hates the whole concept of being saved from their sins. I am reminded of the words of Jesus: "light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil (John 3:19)." When you love darkness you desire to extinguish the light. But when one has been graciously brought into the light of Jesus' cross and empty tomb you want others to receive the same gift. And that means shining the light into the lives of others which invites the real danger that you, like Jesus, will be demonized, ostracized, and crucified.

But that's okay because we know and believe that there is **No Other Name!** We are saved! And that's exactly what Peter and John say to those who put them in prison. These are men who saw the resurrected Jesus and who were unwilling to let go of his name. On the next day, the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with all the big names including the high priest. Our text says:

And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was

rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

The words put chills up and down the spine. These men were being examined in a court of law for doing a crime. And the crime? A good deed done for a crippled man. The problem was that it was done in the name of Jesus. It was an undeniable event. The man was most certainly healed. It was proof that Jesus was alive and doing his work in Peter and John, and the religious leaders knew it and labored against it because it did not fit with their sinful desires, world view, and agenda.

Like Peter and John we know of **no other name** by which we must be saved. The name of Jesus is that he is the Word made flesh who came into this world to live a perfect life for us and to suffer and die for all our sins, even taking to himself every consequence of every sin, including the pains of hell. We believe, teach, and confess what Paul says in Phil. 2:9-11, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” As Peter and John gave an answer to the hope that was in them, we do the same ... regardless of the consequences.

Pastor Kurt Muss was one of the two pastors arrested in 1929 on Christmas. He continued to speak openly of his faith even in the Gulag labor camps. He was executed because of his Christian faith in 1937. For this Lutheran pastor in Russia, there was **No Other Name** but Jesus! So, let me ask the question again: What would your reaction be if something similar to this happened in your lifetime? What would I do under similar circumstances? Prayerfully, we will hold on to the name of Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/what-lenin-said-about-christians-and-socialism.html>

<https://europeanconservative.com/articles/interviews/temples-in-the-hearts-of-the-people-an-interview-with-rev-matthew-heise/>