

Our Bible reading continues on from the reading we heard last Sunday. This is the day after.

Last week we heard about a disturbance in the temple. Peter and John were in the thick of it, along with a man, lame from birth. By the name of Jesus Peter had healed this man who had been lame from birth; and he had raised quite a hullabaloo, with his jumping and shouting and praising God. Rev Rosemary Cox gave a very helpful and challenging talk about how Jesus changes lives, when we listen to God's prompting, when we listen to others, when we have the courage to pray and to share our trust in Jesus.

What happened next? Well it's not what I would call good news. There were Peter and John preaching to the gathered crowd that this man has been healed in the name of Jesus, and that Jesus has been raised from death. They were preaching resurrection.

Now the temple was under the control of a political and religious group called the Sadducees. The Sadducees were very religious, but they didn't believe in resurrection. Talk of resurrection was not welcome in the temple. What happened next? The temple police arrived. They were Sadducees and they were not happy. They broke up the disturbance and they arrested Peter and John.

The next day...now we come to today's reading. Annas and Caiaphas, Alexander and John and others of Annas's family have gathered and they had Peter and John brought before them. It seems likely that Annas was very wealthy. He was not actually the high priest now, but he had been high priest 20 years earlier. And for years he had been the godfather of the Jewish people. The High

Priest for more than a decade had been Caiaphas, his son-in-law. It seems the two were a kind of double act. Not just Caiaphas but every other high priest in recent memory had been from the family of Annas. All appointed, all kept in power, by the Romans, for a price. So Annas must have been well off.

It was Annas and Caiaphas, and this family who had earlier arrested Jesus, had handed Jesus over to Pilate to be crucified. Annas and his family held all the cards, all the power.

But not all the power. There is something they afraid of. A lame man has been healed, without their permission, on their watch, and that lame man has been jumping around and praising God. So they ask the question, by what power or name did you do this? This was a question about power. Rich, powerful, religious, Annas, the godfather, and his powerful family, ask Peter and John – by what power? Annas was preoccupied with power, it was his life. Religion and political power are often a dangerous mix.

So here we have a kind of *déjà vu*. A few weeks ago it was Jesus. Now it is Peter and John, standing before the same men who handed Jesus over to be crucified; standing before sincerely religious men, but men preoccupied by power, before ruthless men. But they do not seem to be afraid.

What did Peter have to say about power? Peter suddenly embodied power. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke to them. Peter spoke about Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the one they silenced; the one they rejected, the one they handed over to Pilate, shouting crucify.

Then, a few weeks ago, this Peter had denied Jesus completely; denied Jesus - not before Annas and his powerful family. Peter denied Jesus to a girl at the door, to a servant. But now we see God's power at work because Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The power Peter spoke about was hard for these men to understand. The power that healed the lame man was released by faith in the name of Jesus. It was not coercive power, to force the man to walk; it was not a kind of manipulative power to trick, hypnotising the man into thinking he could walk.

Peter spoke of healing power that made a lame man walk. Healing power, kindness power. And he claimed that power was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; the man was healed in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the one that Peter had denied, Jesus is the one that these men had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead. Healing power in the name of Jesus.

This man was healed by faith in the name of Jesus. We read of other healings in the gospel. But we do not often see healings like this today in the life of the church. That is a question to draw us closer to Christ in prayer. The power of Jesus has sustained us, and continues to sustain us, through times of illness and loss. I am often encouraged by brothers and sisters who testify to this.

But then Peter goes further – the name of Jesus has more, more than just healing power. The name of Jesus has saving power. The power to give forgiveness, refreshing; the power to give the gift of eternal life. Saving power. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.

I am reminded of the 21 Coptic Christian martyrs who were beheaded on a beach in Libya in February 2015. The name of Jesus was on their lips as they died. 'Ya Rabbi Yassou!'; 'Oh my Lord Jesus'.

Jesus was rejected by religious power, rejected by men. But Jesus is alive. Over the centuries millions of our brothers and sisters have given their lives for Jesus. And, in Christ, they too are alive. There is power in the name of Jesus – healing power, saving power.

Some people say that all religions are basically the same. But Peter says of Jesus, 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among to men by which you must be saved.'

There is no religious practice necessary – be it good or bad.

Salvation through prayer? - no, we are not saved by praying.

Salvation through fasting, thankfully no, or I'd be lost for sure.

Through pilgrimage? – no, through giving money or through doing good works? -no, through washing in a holy river? No. through any of these? No. Through all of these? No

Only one way. Call on the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus who was rejected. Jesus who was crucified. Jesus, who was raised from death. Jesus, whose power is in weakness and service.

Through faith in the name of Jesus we have healing, forgiveness, salvation. In all of history there is only one who gave his life for us on the cross, and rose again. His name is Jesus. He is the Lord. May your name be on my lips 'Oh my Lord Jesus'.

