

Acts 4:1-12

Christ the King, Reformation 500 Christ Alone, November 26, 2017

Theme: Solus Christus: Only Christ

I. To many: bogus

II. To believers: bonus

III. To us: boldness

INJ A plumber's job is to keep the water in the right place. It should stay in the pipes until it comes out of the faucet. No leaks. No problems. Except that water is always looking to take advantage of a weak spot. It will burst through the smallest crack. Having water all over the floor is not useful. The plumber makes sure the water only comes out of the faucet and only goes down the drain.

Today we talk about one of the "only's" of the Reformation. Solus Christus means only Christ is our Savior. There is one way to have forgiveness and eternal life; any other way is a disaster. Our sinful hearts are continually seeking another way, wanting to burst out of the pipes and make our own path, but that only leads to death. To many people, Only Christ is bogus, but to believers it is a bonus, and to us, it gives boldness.

In our lesson today, two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, were speaking about Jesus to the crowds at the Temple in Jerusalem. What had happened was that a lame man had been there begging for alms. The disciples didn't have money to give, but they gave something better. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified but rose from the dead, they healed this man who had never walked before.

People were amazed. This man had been placed at the gate for years. They knew him. He had been unable to walk, but now he was running and jumping and praising Christ alone for this miracle! As a crowd gathered, the leaders grew concerned about security. Roman soldiers intervened and arrested Peter and John. Jewish leaders took them and arranged a meeting to deal with what had happened.

On the one side were the powerful people. The rulers, elders, high priests, Sadducees and Pharisees had their own way of dealing with spiritual issues. It involved their own efforts plus their political power plus their personal goals. There was no room in their hearts for Christ. Much less for Christ alone. So they couldn't accept a miracle done by Jesus of Nazareth. He was an outsider from Galilee! He didn't follow the rules! Reason didn't see value in a seemingly weak and crucified person who claimed to be God Almighty. Reason couldn't accept resurrection from the dead. Christ had to be bogus because he didn't fit in!

On the other side stood Peter and John confessing Christ alone. Will you stand with them? What would you say to the powerful people? Would you apologize for making a fuss and hope to get away without legal trouble? Peter made a bold confession of Christ alone: "If we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed."

Peter didn't heal the man. John didn't. This was straight up a miracle done only by Jesus Christ who was dead but is now alive. Look! The man is walking! Did the evidence convince the Sadducees? No. They were adamant that this Jesus was bogus. Peter kept saying as clearly as possible: Solus Christus: Only Christ.

At another pivotal point in history the center of Christian teaching came under attack. Martin Luther was put on trial for saying Christ alone. He confessed that to forgive sins was work only Christ can do. Not me. Not the church. Solus Christus: Only Christ. Luther stood before the emperor and powerful people in the church who insisted on their own way that didn't really have room for Jesus. The consensus was that what Luther taught was bogus. Luther confessed what the Bible says: Solus Christus.

We don't have to imagine those kind of circumstances. Every day we face the pressure to work around Christ. How often don't you hear that what the Bible says is bogus? Creation. Life begins at conception. God's gift of sexual relations is only for marriage. Marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. To give in on any point is to cave on Christ, isn't it?

The contrast couldn't be more clear. Either Christ Jesus paid for your sins, or he didn't. Either the Bible is true, or it isn't. Either you have peace with God, or you do not. Either you have a Savior or you don't. One path is the Bible's: Only Christ. The path of reason or works righteousness or any other path leads to death, no matter how powerful are those who will not trust Christ alone.

People "out there" consider Christ to be bogus. Unfortunately, we all too often encourage them by our silence or our weakness. Stand up like Peter? Like Luther? We haven't, and perhaps we can't! But there is one better to look to than Peter or Luther. Look to Christ alone. He is stronger than threats or persecution or the hate that is spewed at us. Jesus is stronger than death, for he defeated it and rose from the grave! Jesus is stronger than your weakness and silence, too. He forgives it completely. No, he is not bogus. To those who trust in him, Christ alone is a wonderful bonus.

Why would we endure the abuse of those who reject Christ? We still confess him alone because Jesus is greater and more valuable. Jesus Christ gives victory over every sin and all guilt. Look at Peter's bold confession before the scoffers who held him in contempt: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved." The name of Jesus has been revealed to us to free us from our captivity to sin. He has broken the prison of condemnation by his suffering and death on the cross. The Third Day he rose from the dead to proclaim sins forgiven. As we read in our Second Lesson, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." How are we justified (declared not guilty)? Christ alone!

The bonus Christ alone gives was precious to Martin Luther. For so many years he had tried to find peace with God by his good behavior. When he approached God on his own terms, there was always uncertainty. Had he done enough? How could he be sure? Scripture's proclamation is that you can be sure because of Solus Christus. Christ declares you righteous. God doesn't lie. There can be no doubt that heaven is your home because you are saved by Christ alone.

The message is precious to you and to me, too. The pressure to depart from Christ alone doesn't just come from outside. Our own sinful hearts like to think our own ways are just as good. It comes to light when we look to our upstanding life: I was pretty good, so I hope I get to heaven. I tried hard. We have good kids. I come to church. Give my offerings. I served on boards for many years! I used to be in charge of that! When sins condemn and guilt presses hard, those things are all dead ends that will never give peace. Only Christ can forgive. Only Christ does.

Whether it is our own hearts or the world around, Solus Christus is unnatural. "The stone the builders rejected..." Yet Isaiah proclaimed it clearly in our First Lesson: I am the LORD, there is no other. Peter was unmistakable to the Jewish rulers. Jesus is the only Way, Truth and Life. Christ alone is the cornerstone! He gives us confidence because he died and rose again. He is the Savior who declares us righteous. He is the only one who not only exposes our sin, but also cleanses us from it completely.

Sometimes I am afraid of what might happen if I stand on Christ alone. What if I say the wrong thing? What if I fail? When your fear rises, stop. Where is your confidence? Not in "I." Not in some self-devised plan. Only Christ. Look at what he did through the sinful people of history. In Jerusalem, the group of believers grew every day. They were persecuted and scattered, but they took their Jesus with them wherever they went.

God built his church not on Peter or John, but on Christ alone.

The same thing happened in Germany 500 years ago. Some believed the message despite the danger to their life and property. Despite the misdirection and the false teaching. The Gospel worked not because of Martin Luther or anyone else. The power of salvation is Christ alone.

God still accomplishes his plans among us in this day and age. Not because of our effort or ingenuity or skill, but Christ alone. Only Christ is a message that gives us boldness to speak. Those who oppose the message we proclaim are not standing against us, but against God himself. The power to win the battle lies not in us, but in him. In fact, the victory is not in doubt, for Jesus has risen from the dead. We stand and speak boldly because our hope is Solus Christus: Christ alone.

Peter was bold. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved." Luther was bold. Before the emperor at the Diet of Worms he confessed, "Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me." The message of Christ alone was rejected by the builders, the popular people, the movers and shakers in the world. Yet the cornerstone of Christianity remains unmoved to this day. Christ alone is our salvation. We, too, are bold!

The battle is fierce and we will get weary. On every side are deniers. Even inside the church are wolves in sheep's clothing. All are seeking to divert attention, to work around Christ. They will not stop trying. God has promised that it will get worse as we near the end.

The only spot that is solid and true is Solus Christus. It is counter cultural for you to turn to someone outside yourself, but you boldly do. It is contrary to your sinful nature to rely not on your own understanding, but you trust Christ alone. You will be treated with disrespect and dishonor. You will have doubts thrown at you by the devil. But it doesn't change a thing. Your bold confidence is that forgiveness has been won on the cross and proclaimed by the empty tomb. Salvation is secure because it rests on Christ alone. You are bold and certain of it because God says so.

He even gives you the faith to trust him boldly. He gives the courage to stand up and speak out. Confidence and the words to say are his gift to you, too. It is all him. Not you. Isn't it refreshing to say it? Christ alone is my Savior. My heaven is never in doubt. Peace is never uncertain – never unreliable – never in jeopardy. Christ alone: my joy and delight!

We always want to insert ourselves into the system. My power. My desires. My interests. My reason. Me. I bring all sorts of trouble, sorrow, spiritual turmoil into my life that way. Then there is Christ alone. He is forgiveness. He is peace. He is mine. Solus Christus. SDG Amen.