

In The Name Of Jesus

Vicar Philip Casmer

“**W**hat’s in a name?” Juliet first spoke those words from what is now the most famous garden-balcony in history. The names of Romeo and Juliet are known the world over even four-hundred years after Shakespeare penned this play. Yet for Romeo and Juliet, their names were a curse. A war between families bombarded their love, pressing Juliet to ask the question, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.” If only Romeo’s was another name. According to Juliet, a name was just a few letters woven together, easily tossed aside like a dirty shirt. It’s a good thing Jesus’ disciple Peter wasn’t waiting below Juliet’s balcony, because he wouldn’t agree with her. Peter would say that names are important, in fact, that they are everything, especially when it comes to the name of Jesus.

Live Without Fear

The one thing Romeo and Juliet probably wanted was a life without fear. In the end, they went so far as to commit suicide because they were too afraid to live without one another. Wouldn’t a life free from fear be nice? No fear of danger, or disaster, or embarrassment, or anger, or death. No fear of being afraid to witness to others about the Savior.

The interesting thing about the Apostle Peter’s fears is that they were usually preceded by fearlessness. How often he must have prayed for a life free from fear. Standing on the waters of the sea of Galilee, solidly trusting in Jesus’ power, then trust sadly sinking away as wind and waves erode courage down to fear until all that is left of Peter is a hand reaching desperately for help (Matt 14:22-35). Oh to live without fear. Peter’s fearlessness in the garden had fled as Jesus was dragged away, skulking around the smoky fires of an illegal, late-night trial on Good Friday morning, shaking with cold as the people huddle for heat. Fearlessness was replaced with fear of a servant-girl’s questions and the looks of temple-guards, enough to call down curses to escape association with

the Savior (Matt 26:69-75). Oh to live a life without fear.

It looks almost like a different Peter as you read our sermon text today. If Peter ever had a time to be afraid it was this one. Interrogated by the seventy-two bearded men of the Sanhedrin, seated in an angry semicircle around

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Acts 4:8-12

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

him, standing, most likely, in the same spot where Jesus stood months before, in front of the same men who condemned him to death. But his words showed no fear. “If you’re asking me about the good deed we did today, healing this cripple, well then pay attention. I’m neither evading questions, nor cowering in fear, and I’ll tell you confidently. In fact, ‘let it be known’ to all that we did this in the name of Jesus Christ.” If I told you that I’ve decided that America is going to war against China, would you wait for jets to begin bombing, for troops to start mobilizing? I hope not, because I’m only Vicar Casmer, and I have no political power, no authority, and no right to command soldiers to war. My name holds no power. It’s like Peter is saying, “Pay attention to one name. Pay attention to Jesus’ name because it holds power even over death. You crucified him, but God raised him from the dead.” There is no fear here. No sink-

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OUR MISSION

As God’s disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God’s Word in its truth and purity.

By God’s grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

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ing faith, no shivering, cursing cowardice. God's power runs through Peter like a live wire, working by faith that hangs on to the name of Jesus.

This week National Geographic has an article on the Gospel of Judas. It's been in the news for the past few weeks. Basically, this second century text says Jesus commanded Judas to betray him. More than a few "scholars" rushed to validate and support that message? It isn't very often, if ever, that our lives are in the angry hands of a religious court. But we do stand in the court of public opinion, like Peter and John? How often does the world question our "good deeds" of faith – "In whose name do you do these things?" "Close communion? How unloving! You would deny people God's forgiveness?" We do so because God's Word says that those who participate without knowing that Jesus' body and blood are truly present bring judgment on themselves (1 Cor 11:29). Maybe it sounds like this instead, "You won't even pray with us? You're so judgmental." We won't because God says to watch out for those who don't agree with God's Word. In fact, he says to keep away from them (Rom 16:17). When you're questioned, in the media or by family and friends, do you feel more like the Peter full-of-fear than the other? Fear whispers in our ears, "Don't bother with this stuff, God's Word makes this little part of life too hard and it causes too much trouble. Forget it, what's it going to hurt anyway?" Sometimes we act just like fearful Peter did and shrink away, slinking off into the darkness because we are living for our own name and reputation and not in the name of Jesus.

He paid for your fear and mine so that we can live under the name of Jesus without fear.

The damning sin of fear pushes us to run away, even to disown God at times. God says he will disown anyone that disowns him before the world (Matt 10:33). Fearful flight from standing with Christ leads us out of light into darkness – into hell. But if, instead, we live in the name of Jesus, then we live without fear. We have God's Spirit poured out on us just as Peter did. We've been made God's sons and daughters by the blood of Jesus. Don't be afraid. God's Spirit guides us just like he did Peter. What do we most fear when people question us? Isn't it, "What will I say?" Jesus says, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matt 10:19-20)." We wear Jesus' name like a suit of armor because there is nothing more powerful. The one who conquered sin by living without the sin of fear crowned his perfect life by conquering

death. He paid for your fear and mine so that we can live under the name of Jesus without fear. And now his name lives in you.

Confident Of Salvation

Two weeks ago I took a vacation to Colorado Springs. I feel refreshed because I took some rest. But I also feel refreshed because while there I listened to our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus sing. One of my favorite parts of our Seminary Chorus concerts is when we sing "The Church's One Foundation." In Colorado Springs, they sang it with the children of the churches there. What an amazing thing to see and hear, children and young men singing faith in their Savior Jesus, who is the foundation of the Church, the Cornerstone. That's what Peter calls Christ, the Cornerstone. Obviously he's not part of a house made by hands. That's why we can be confident of salvation. God is the builder.

I like building- and floor-plans. They interest me. When I was younger one of my favorite things to do was to spend a Saturday morning building with Lego's. My brothers and I had buckets and buckets of them. We would build the pirate outposts, space ships, and race cars by following the directions. Of course, if we deviated from the plans, things usually went south. God had a plan too. His was for building salvation. From moments after the first sin, men were to look for the coming Messiah to find salvation. From the beginning, and even under all the Old Testament sacrifices and laws, salvation was always by God's undeserved love alone. Grace is how God considered Abraham righteous and grace is how we are saved. It is not by good works we do, but by the gracious gift of God, by faith in Jesus, the Messiah, who paid for sin.

The leaders who questioned Peter and John had killed Jesus because they didn't like God's plan. They wanted to do it on their own. They liked their neat little laws for righteousness and how good their system made them look. They tried to build salvation themselves. But plans for self-made salvation are flawed from the start. In Peter's day they would use one stone, perfectly cut, as the plumb line of all the lines in a building. Peter tells us that God is the builder of the house of salvation and he made Christ that perfect stone, the Cornerstone. He is the key piece in the plan. "Follow the directions," Peter says, "because Christ made no mistakes and with him in the foundation your salvation-house cannot fall."

That's our confidence. We are in the name of Jesus. We've got the cornerstone in our salvation-house. We were baptized into his name. There the Holy Spirit put faith in our hearts. We commune together at Jesus' Supper. There we proclaim his death that brought us life and we fellowship with God and with one another. We live in Easter joy every day

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because we live in the name of the Savior who rose from the dead. Now death won't hold us either.

Men try to alter the plan with other key pieces, other cornerstones. "Devote your life to Mohammed." "Follow Charles Darwin." "Stand up with Joseph Smith." "Believe in yourself." Don't do it. Peter says your confidence comes from one name and one name only. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." This is God's plan. We have to be saved from sin in order to have fellowship with God and we can not save ourselves. We must live under Jesus' name. He knocked down the wobbly house of self-righteousness. He demolished the power of sin by defeating

death with eternal life for all in his name. What's in a name? Everything! There isn't another name that has this kind of power, because no one else has done what Jesus did.

People always say that Romeo and Juliet died for love, but I don't think so. After all their talk about how little names really mean, Romeo and Juliet died because of their names. They had so much fear and no confidence. But that's not us. In the name of Jesus we live.



Philip Casmer is serving as vicar at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.

This Week's Announcements

ALL-OCCASION CARDS- Cards including confirmation, baptism, and graduation are provided at cost for the congregation as a service of the Ladies' Guild. They are located on the shelves in the northeast corner of the fellowship room and are available on a self-serve basis. Any Ladies' Guild member will be glad to help if needed.

FORWARD IN CHRIST & MEDITATIONS- The May issue of Forward in Christ and the May 28 - August 26 issue of Meditations are available in the entry. Please feel free to take a copy of both.

BIKE RODEO- Mark your calendars for Saturday, June 10! We will be hosting an outreach event for the community from 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. There will be free drawings for new bikes, food, a road course facilitated by the Billings Police, and free bike helmets for the first 140 children 3 - 10 years of age. Invite friends and family for a fun event as we make new relationships and strengthen existing friendships.

WWW.APOSTLESMT.NET- Check back often for the most current news and events. Weekly sermons are available in the Apostles This Week newsletter, and new devotions are usually posted a couple of times per week. Apostles This Week and the Grace MEMO devotions are mailable - all they need is an address and a stamp - so when you're done reading it, send it on to a family member or a friend. Did you know that the monthly newsletter, Apostles Epistle, is available online? So are the monthly church and preschool calendars, the weekly bulletin insert and worship folder, pre-

school news, photo galleries, and even some humor! If you have church-related content you would like posted on Apostles' website, please send an e-mail to web@apostlesmt.net or put a note in the Sorensen's mailbox.

SHARING GOD'S LOVE WITH OTHERS- Ladies Guild chose Tumbleweed Runaway Program, Inc. as our May service project. Tumbleweed is a non-profit, community-based group that helps youth in crisis. They are moving into a new space (a house) and will have rooms for six youth in need. We have offered to help outfit their kitchen. A list of what is needed is posted in the narthex. New or gently used items will be collected through May 6. Please consider giving generously to these youth who haven't had all the blessings of life in a loving, Christian home.

SPRING TEA- Apostles' annual Spring Tea, sponsored by the Ladies Guild, will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, May 6 in the Fellowship Hall. This is a great opportunity for the women of Apostles to enjoy food, fun and fellowship as we celebrate Spring in Montana! Bring your favorite appetizer to share.

MISS CHURCH THIS WEEK? Read the Apostles This Week newsletter and then pass it on to a friend! If you've really been gone for a while, you can crawl down into Apostle's Archives at www.apostlesmt.net and see what you missed.

WORSHIP FOLDER AND ANNOUNCEMENTS- More announcements are available in the bulletin insert, which is available online, along with the worship folder.

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
Billings, Montana

Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes Sunday at 9:15 a.m.

Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m.

Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a **Bible Information Class**.

More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.

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Inside: This Week's Sermon

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