

It took seven games, but they did it. The Astros won their first world series in franchise history. Maybe some of you hit the stores already last week getting your gear that proudly proclaims them as world champions. That’s what the world series ring some of the players are showing off in the news says, too: “World champions.”

I don’t wanna rain on the parade this morning. But couldn’t some people take issue with that title, *world* champions? I mean, it is a pretty exclusive claim, right? They are the best team in the world. But...they only beat teams from North America. Saying they’re the *world* champions excludes teams from Cuba, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Japan...teams they’ve never even played. How do we know they’re really *world* champions?

I’ll stop right there before anyone runs me out of the pulpit. But I bring it up today because in our sermon lesson we hear Peter make an exclusive claim about Jesus. Not world champion; world’s Savior. Even more exclusive than world champions, because that just says best team of many. Peter doesn’t call Jesus the best Savior of many. He calls him this world’s *only* Savior. **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**

That’s an exclusive claim that people from Peter’s day to the present have been taking issue with. In fact, there’s a part of us that finds it troublesome, too. But it’s an exclusive claim that’s true, and really it’s the only truth that gives us peace. Listen as Peter tells you that Christ Alone Saves! 1) It’s a truth the troubles many, but it’s 2) the truth that gives real peace.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then 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. ¹¹Jesus is

**“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”^[a]**

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

I. A truth that troubles many

Christ alone is the truth we’re celebrating today. We rejoice in it. We’re singing songs about it. So it might surprise us to see people like the Jewish leaders who are so troubled by it.

You might remember what happened just before these verses. Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. On their way, they ran into a man crippled from birth who sat every day by one of the temple gates, begging. When he asked Peter and John for money, they said, “That we don’t have. But what we have, we’ll give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And the man went walking and leaping and praising God.

What could be so troubling about an act of kindness to a cripple that it would lead the Jewish leaders to throw Peter and John in prison? Well, it wasn’t the miracle itself. It was what Peter and John said afterwards: When the crowds asked, “how,” Peter said, “It wasn’t us; it was Christ alone.” And then he went on to tell them how this same Jesus who saved a cripple from his handicap was the Christ who alone could save them from their sins.

And *that* was what was so troubling to the Jewish leaders. Remember, they taught the people that they were saved by obeying God’s laws, a system of sacrifices and obedience that would make them right with God. And it was a system they were in charge of, because they explained to the people what God’s law meant. Saved by Christ alone is a threat to their system of salvation, their control over the people.

Was it any different in Luther’s day? Like Peter and John, all Luther did was preach that salvation depended on Christ alone. Like Peter and John, that made him an enemy of the church’s most powerful leaders. What was so troubling about this simple truth? Because they taught people they were saved by obeying the rules, a system of works of penance and prayers and indulgences and relics. And it was a system they were in charge of, which kept their control over the people. Saved by Christ alone made it all obsolete.

I guess it shouldn’t surprise us that this truth is so troublesome to so many, because it still is today. A recent poll of millennials – ages 17-37 – 70% rejected the statement that Jesus is the only way to heaven. The new “system” for salvation is pluralism – that one religion is as good as another, that god by any name saves. As long as you’re sincere in your beliefs and try to do what’s right, you’ll be okay. Christ alone is a threat to that system and an individual’s “control” over salvation – and believing it will get you called arrogant or intolerant.

Of course, we can look closer to home than that. This whole wanting to keep control over our salvation...coming up with our own systems or standards for getting right with God...thinking that in some way it depends on me...we find it in our hearts, too, don’t we? Maybe our system is trying to salve our guilty conscience by trying harder or bringing to mind the good we do. Maybe it’s blaming others for our sins. Or the comparison game; thinking that the fact we avoid certain sins we’ve deemed worse than others makes us not as bad as most. That when we’ve had a week when we’ve behaved better, we’re somehow closer to God. Holding on to the notion that going to church and being a nice person...

You know where that comes from? Sinful pride. We don’t want to admit that if salvation is gonna be found, it has to come to us from completely outside of us. It has to be 100% the work of another. We don’t want to admit it, because that means also admitting that we are thoroughly corrupt, utterly helpless, unable to move an inch closer to God on our own. **“Salvation is found in no one else!”** Peter’s words crush our pride because they completely exclude us from saving ourselves!

Yet you hear the good news there, too, don't you? “**Salvation is found in no one else,**” but salvation *is found*. It isn't hidden, and God has made it available to all! It's not found in Allah or Buddha. It's not found in penance and prayers and indulgences and relics. It's not found in you or in me – not one bit. It's found in Christ alone!

Christ alone saves. That's because no one and nothing else could do what Jesus did. No one else is true God who became also true man. No one else was miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus born without sin. No one else has or will ever live a perfectly sinless life in the place of all mankind, so that it counts as righteousness for all sinners. No one else can pay for a single sin, even in part, much less for all sin in full.

No one else...but Jesus did. Salvation is found in no one else...but most certainly found in him. Peter cites his resurrection from the dead as proof to all: Jesus is this world's perfect, all sufficient Savior. Christ alone saves.

II. The truth that gives real peace

And it's this truth alone that gives us real peace. The system of sacrifices and obedience Jewish leaders pointed the people to in Peter's day...the system of works of penance and prayer and pilgrimages the Church pointed to in Luther's day and still today...pluralism that points you to whatever god or way of salvation you choose...looking anywhere but to Christ alone...at best, that will only give you a false peace. A false sense of security that you're okay with God, only to find out in terror on the Last Day that you weren't.

But often it leaves you with no peace. Like Luther, before God led him to believe this truth that Christ alone saves. He was following the church's system of works to a “T,” but he realized that if he was doing them to save himself, then he was not doing them out of love for God; out of love for himself. And that meant the works he was relying on were just more sins! Left him not with peace, but “*anfechtung*” – turmoil, doubt, despair.

Friends, only this truth that we're saved by Christ alone gives real peace. Real security. Peter describes that peace and security by quoting a Psalm that calls Jesus the **cornerstone** – so just let me explain to you a little bit about masonry. Now-a-days, cornerstones are mostly ornamental – back then, they were fundamental. The chief cornerstone was the first stone laid. It had to be perfectly flat on each side, with 90 degree angles at it's edges, because all the other stones were lined up from it; so really, the whole building depended on it. A faulty cornerstone meant a faulty foundation and a building that would crumble.

You see what he's saying? People who are depending on anything other than Christ for salvation are building on a faulty cornerstone that will fail them. But Christ? Christ is that perfect cornerstone. It's true, many toss him aside, but it doesn't change the fact that he has become the perfect cornerstone. His saving work was perfect in every way. Nothing you need to add to it; nothing you can add to it. The righteousness he won for you is flawless. The forgiveness he won for you is complete. “The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

**Christ the Lord Lutheran – Alief
Reformation 500: “Christ Alone”
November 4th, 2017**

**Pastor Degner
Acts 4:1-12
“Christ Alone Saves”**

So the one who trusts in him will have real peace. There is no condemnation left for you, because Jesus suffered it all for you. Peace that we’re right with God now...peace that when we stand before God on the Last Day, we’ll have his approval...all because of Christ alone.

Since it’s the only truth that gives real peace, it’s also the truth this world most desperately needs to hear. Peter amazes us. Remember, he’s standing before same ones who just a couple months earlier sentenced Jesus to death. They’re trying to shut him up, yet he won’t be silenced. Because although “Christ alone saves” excludes any other cause of salvation, it is an invitation that includes all people – even Jesus’ enemies. An invitation to trust in Christ alone and find real peace. Do you hear Peter inviting them to this peace? “...**by which we must be saved.**”

We might never be in quite his situation, but we are surrounded by a world that would silence our confession that Christ alone saves. May we be filled with the Holy Spirit and bold enough to speak. And may God the Holy Spirit lead others to believe it and know that this world’s only Savior is their Savior, too, and thus find real peace.

It might be too exclusive to be true, but I won’t knock you if you call the Astros “world champions.” Jesus is this world’s only Savior. That’s all-exclusive, but it is most certainly true. So believe it and share it – Christ alone saves. Amen.