

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen

Remember your childhood days when Mom or Dad or someone in authority used your full name to get your attention? Why do we do that? Usually, it means it's time to get serious because something difficult is coming next. Often, it means a punishment or correction, especially if our name was said loudly and sternly.

But we also use our given names on legal documents, diplomas, or anything in which we want to be sure people know that we are that designated person. We are known by our names.

In our reading from Acts today, Peter and John have participated in the healing of a man who had never walked a step in his life. It was an amazing miracle to be sure, so it's no surprise when the word spreads that the people in the temple gather around to see it for themselves and to check out the newest miracle workers.

But rather than taking a bow, Peter turns the spotlight on Jesus. And he begins by addressing the crowd using their given name—"Israelites!" That name isn't used much in any of the gospels. In fact it is only used once in the gospel of John when Jesus first meets his future disciple Nathanael.

Then and in our reading today, the name Israelite is used, not to scold, but as a name of honor. In using that name, Peter is reminding the people that this is the name God gave them as descendants of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the gospels, this people is known by their common name, the Jews or the Jewish people. This name was given to them by other nations following the Babylonian Exile, when they were just a remnant of the nation they once were. It was short for the name Judah, the primary tribe of Israel that had been led away when Jerusalem was destroyed about 500 years before Jesus. The name Jew may have been a derogatory nickname at first, but it stuck.

So when Peter speaks to the crowd and calls them Israelites, it seems as though he is trying to get their attention and to remind them of who they are and to whom they belong. They are God's chosen people whom God blessed to be a blessing to the world.

Peter uses this healing event in the temple to bring a serious message to God's people.

We must be careful here, not to focus only on the Jewish people in this passage. As Christians we also see ourselves as descendants of Abraham in faith. Peter's words for the people on that day are words we must also hear for ourselves. In fact, our congregation adopted a name that helps us identify with the ancestry of the Israelites.

The name Zion began as a name for Jerusalem, the place where God lived, and later came to be used as another name for God's people, sometimes heard as Daughter Zion. It's a great name for a congregation, a fellowship of believers, because it connects us to God's family going all the way back to the time of King David and looks forward to God's promised future in the book of Revelation. So as we hear Peter's sermon to the Israelites, we are to hear it as a message for modern day Christians as well.

Peter clearly points out how it was not just the Jewish leaders who put Jesus to death. It was all of the people...all of us. On Palm Sunday a few weeks ago, we read the Passion of Jesus as we do every year. And every year the scripts we use have the congregation saying the part of the crowd, "Crucify him!" One of our members said in Adult Forum that day that saying those words is the most difficult part of that service for her.

In that reading we reenact the condemnation of the crowd, and by doing that we recognize that we also live in ways that are hostile toward the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We mock Jesus when we encourage or ignore violence and prejudice.

We condemn the Spirit of Christ when we participate in hurtful gossip and wield power over others.

When we are complicit with the systems and leaders that work against God's desires for healthy creation and community, we are guilty of the same sin that nailed Jesus to the cross.

Peter addressed the crowd not so much to scold them, but to remind them—and us—that we are people who bear the name of God, whether as Israelites or as Christians.

And the One who was crucified was not just a man. Peter says we rejected and killed the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life. These are names used for God. Jesus was not just a nobody from Nazareth, Jesus is the very being of God.

With the Israelites, we must recognize our participation in Jesus' death, and hear Peter's call to us to repent. He understands that we are not always aware of what we are doing, that we sometimes act in ignorance when we turn our back on Jesus and the gospel message.

But like the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, we can come to God asking for alms, for the gifts of life that come to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do that each time we come to this table.

Today, and in the coming weeks, we will be sharing this meal with some of our young people who will be communing for the first time. Kids, one of the things I forgot to talk with you about in your Communion book was to help you write a prayer that you might say before you come to receive the bread of Jesus' forgiveness and the wine of God's salvation. So let's do that now.

Dear Jesus, we do not always love you as we should.
We do not always treat our neighbors with love.
Forgive us, feed us, and change us
so that we can share your love with the world.
Amen

People of Zion, people of God, we are an Easter people who live in the light of Jesus' resurrection! Christ has freed us from the power of sin and death and has given us the gifts of God's mercy, grace, and love to share with others. As we have received, so let us share these gifts with glad and generous hearts!

Thanks be to God! Amen