SERMON – Sunday 14th April – Acts 3:12-19, Psalm 4

Today’s sermon is about salvation, the law and ignorance.

A few years ago - Tyne Tunnel charges – didn’t know. Received the dreaded letter – PAY NOW!

Lying awake worrying - I’ll deny I didn’t know.

Psalm 4 – In peace I will lie down and sleep, for it is you Lord only, who make me dwell in safety. Job done!

HOWEVER, ignorance is not a defence in law, as a sailor named Bailey found out to his inconvenience in 1800.

Bailey (1800) 168 ER 657. The accused was convicted of a crime which Parliament had created while he was on the high seas, and there was no way of finding out that a law had been enacted.

The law doesn’t just affect individuals but also companies. From 1 January 2024 onwards, car manufacturers will need at least 22% of their car sales and 10% of their van sales to be fully electric under the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate which aims at increasing the sale of electric vehicles to help reduce emissions. The government plans to increase this percentage of electric vehicles sold over time so that by 2030, at least 80% of the cars sold are electric, and by 2035, all cars sold in the UK produce zero emissions to stay in line with their ban on the sale of diesel and petrol cars.

Car makers who fail to hit this target in 2024 will be fined £15,000 per car and £9,000 per van short of the target.

Read a number plate from 20 metres away, you pass the eyesight test.

And now I can see you all wondering, where on earth is Pete going with this sermon?

Remember – the sermon is about the law and ignorance!

Background to the reading – lame man in same place everyday and healed by Peter. The crowds that were gathered were obviously amazed by Peter’s actions but, …

The first thing that strikes me here is the way Peter deflects attention from himself and John.

This whole thing is not about them.  In fact, Peter is almost outraged that the people are focusing on.

*“Men of Israel, why do you stare at us as if by our own power and godliness we had made this man walk?”*

I suspect that most of here are susceptible to the lure of fame. In the words of Bros – when will I, will I be famous?

We don’t want to be simply liked; we want to be loved, even adored.  But Peter naturally took the lead here, but there is no hint of “I” in his message. He focussed his entire response towards Jesus.

If we look closely, Peter makes sure he connects the Old Testament with the New, not yet written but soon to be. He calls God, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers.”

What he’s saying in effect is, “I’m not talking about some strange new god here; I’m talking about our God, YHWH, the one true God who has revealed himself to us Jews, including himself. As for us today, we can’t really understand the New Testament without understanding the Old.   The whole Bible is about one thing—the one God focusing his work of salvation on Jesus.” – not an Old Testament God and a different New Testament God. They are one and the same thing.

The humiliation of Jesus, crucified as a common criminal, came at the hands of his fellow Jews, who disowned him.  Peter doesn’t mince words in calling out sin and the sinners here, so much so that it might make us uncomfortable even today.

But a huge caveat, a huge warning here. This business of directly blaming the Jews for Jesus’ death has historically been the root of terrible anti-Semitism that has no place in the church. **So, it’s massively important to note how Peter is not anti-Semitic** **here**.

He doesn’t condemn them for being Jewish; after all, he himself is Jewish and he denied knowing Christ not once but three times. No, he blames them for their sin, and he offers them complete forgiveness for that sin.

*You killed the author of life…. [if you repent and turn to God] your sins [will be] wiped out* – in verse 19.

Their sin of disowning Jesus Christ is not a permanent black mark against the Jews; it is a sin that has been completely forgiven for all who repent and believe. Peter here is being hard on sin, sinners NOT Jews.

He says, ‘it wasn’t our power or godliness that made this cripple walk; it was Jesus who did it.’  His and John’s only role was to have faith, faith in Jesus, the faith that comes through Jesus.

Once again, it’s all about Jesus, the Jesus they had disowned and killed but who God had glorified by raising him from the dead.

And for those Anti-Semites or potential Anti-Semites out there, Peter seems to let them off the hook. He absolutely in no way blames them for what they did.

*“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.”  You didn’t know that the Christ had to suffer.  You had pictured a victorious Christ defeating his enemies with power.  So, when you crucified him, you didn’t know what you were doing.*

But Peter goes on to say that they could have known, and indeed should have known, - refer here to Good Friday – Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

Peter states that God had foretold a suffering Christ through all the prophets.  What they did “is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.”  Peter shouts out, ‘You acted in ignorance.’

But that’s no excuse.  It doesn’t let them off the hook.

Specifically, Peter wants them all to change their minds about Jesus. They’d looked at him all wrong, they’d hated him, and tried to kill him.

So now, he thinks they must change their view of him and their feelings about him. Accept him as the Risen Messiah, love him with all your heart.

‘Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.’

So, here’s what salvation will look like or those who condemned Christ.

First of all, their sins, even this great one, will be wiped out.  God will never hold it against them, God will pardon them, God will erase it from the record, never bringing it up again, He’ll forget it ever happened.

At the centre of it all here in today’s reading from Acts is this message:

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob… glorified his servant Jesus by raising him from the dead.”

That’s the message that changed the world back then and can do so again today.

AMEN