

Trinity 13 - 2018

In case you haven't noticed the 's' word -- "saved" -- has fallen out of the lexicon of most Anglicans.

Maybe a few will talk about "getting saved" or going around asking others if they are "saved" . . . but not many.

It's been out of our vocabulary for quite some time. Oh yes, on occasion, we hear members of other groups using it.

For example, a few years ago I heard a local minister say:

"I was raised Roman Catholic, but then I got saved." I couldn't help but smile.

David Rose, late Bishop of South Virginia, told this story.

In the early days of his ordained ministry he was rector of a church in a small Florida town. One Sunday morning a man with a suit showed up. At the end of the service, on his way out, he introduced himself as a travelling evangelist.

He told Rose he was in town to conduct a series of tent meetings and cordially invited him to come along. The first service was that very evening.

Rose decided to take him up on his invitation. After all, the man had attended his service. It seemed only the courteous and right thing to do.

Arriving at the meeting, he took his place toward the back of the tent.

Everything started off well. The singing was lively. The preaching was energetic. The people seemed to be in earnest.

But, after the evangelist had finished preaching, came the altar call.

At that point in the service, the evangelist asked all who believed that Jesus was the Christ to raise their hand. The Episcopal minister had no choice but to lift his. To do anything less would be to deny his Lord.

Next, the evangelist asked all who believed Jesus died on the cross for their sins to stand up. The Episcopal minister again felt compelled to comply.

The evangelist then summoned all those who confessed Jesus as Lord to come forward. Having gone this far, there was no turning back, and so he went.

No sooner than he had arrived at the front, the evangelist pounced on him and announced: **“Praise the Lord. This Episcopal brother just got saved.”** We smile.

It may well be because of such antics as these that Anglicans are reticent about using the ‘s’ word. But, if you listened to this morning’s second lesson, there it is.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” asked the Philippian jailor.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” came Paul and Silas’ answer.

It’s in the Bible, and we are Bible people. So, I guess we Anglicans are just going to have to make peace with this word.

But, what does the Bible mean by it?

Well, the Greek word that stands behind it is ‘solzo’. It means: delivered, rescued, brought into a state of safety, and, on occasion, healed or made whole.

It was this last one – to heal or made whole – that caught my attention this week.

Most of you know the story of the woman with an issue of blood.

She had had this malady for 12 years and had spent all her money on doctors, but to no avail.

Then Jesus came, and making her way through the crowd, she reached out and touched his clothing. But what was she thinking as she did? The text tells us.

“If I but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be *what*?” Our English translation says, “made whole”, but the Greek word is **‘saved’**.

That day she was saved from the mental and physical anguish associated with that malady and from the isolation that this illness imposed on her.

So, 'getting saved' is broader than having a religious experience.

In this morning's New Testament lesson, we again find the word used. This time, as we have already seen, it is the jailor who uses it: **"Sirs, what must I do be saved?"**

But, what did he mean by 'saved'? Well, it's hard to say.

It could be, he meant nothing more than, "How can I get out of this jamb I am in?"

. . . the jamb being the severe punishment that will follow if a single prisoners – earthquake or not -- escapes.

But there is second possibility.

Just perhaps he had been so impressed with the sincerity and integrity of Paul and Silas that he wanted whatever they had. After all, how many men in stocks sing hymns of praise? Yet, that is what these two had been doing all evening.

Just perhaps, this jailer wanted to be saved from the hopelessness and meaningless which permeated the world of paganism of his day.

. . . the same hopelessness and meaningless, I might add, that permeates secular society today: *One darned thing after another and then you die.*

Whichever way it was, whatever he meant, he got the whole package that day.

Not only did no prisoner escape (and thus his life and job were saved), but he also got saved spiritually. The power and penalty of sin were lifted. *His* chains fell off. *He* – and indeed his whole household -- was set free.

I want to suggest the salvation this family receive that night has three dimensions.

It is first **possessive**.

By ‘possessive’ I mean it is something we have right here and now. It is a present possession. The moment we believe, a pardon we receive.

Right from the start we are given a new status. In the Sacrament of Baptism:

- We are identified with Christ.
- We die and are raised with Him.

- The Holy Spirit takes up residence within us and bears witness with our spirit that these things are true.

But, it is also **progressive**.

We are declared in the right – righteous -- but we still have some growing, developing, *progressing*, to do. We must be transformed into the likeness of Christ. That is the goal.

Of course, it goes without saying that we must cooperate with the grace we have been given if we are to make progress in this direction.

But, there is still a third dimension to salvation. It is **prospective**.

By prospective, I mean salvation has a future aspect. We are *heirs by hope*, in the words of the Prayer Book.

In the beginning, we receive a judicial declaration of being in the right -- justified. But the final verdict comes when we hear our Lord say:

“Well done, thy good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” At that day, hope gives way to sight. So, salvation is at once:

- **possessive** [ours right here and now],
- **progressive** [we are journey], and
- **prospective** [there is a destination to be attained].

All three are part of what it means to be saved.

But, there is more. Possessors of salvation are called to be agents of salvation.

If someone one asked *you* the question the Philippian jailor asked Paul – What must I do to be saved? -- what could you tell that person?

Would you stand there with your mouth closed like a dammed-up river? Or, would you be able to ‘tell it out’?

In preparing for such a moment, let me suggest that you memorize the six words Paul used on this occasion: **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**. That is it in a nutshell.

Of course, those words need some fleshing out.

For example, your seeker needs to be told that “believe” means more than a bare acknowledge that there once lived a man named Jesus. Rather, ‘believe’ means to rest all my hope on this One . . . to give Him my total allegiance and loyalty.

And, certainly we want to bring that one to the waters of baptism.

Baptism seems to settle the matter. It takes feelings out the equation, marks us out as children of the Heavenly Father and leaves an indelible mark on the human soul. ///

Throughout this week, as I have meditated on today’s text, the words of an old American Gospel song have kept ringing in my ears.

“We have heard the joyful sound, Jesus saves, Jesus saved!

“Spread the tidings all around: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

“Bear the news to ev’ry land,
Climb the steeps and cross the waves;

“Onward! -- ‘tis our Lord’s command; Jesus saves! Jesus saves!”

Two little words, yet words with great meaning.

Joyful words. Hopeful words. Healing words. Life-changing words.

I don't know about you, but I think I am beginning to like them., even getting a warm feeling when I see them on one of those signs around town.

Just perhaps, it's time we Anglicans put the 's' word back into our lexicon.