

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

March 31, 2024 – EASTER/RESURRECTION SUNDAY, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Called Forth From the Grave*”

Acts 10:34-43 (God raised Jesus from the dead so that forgiveness could be preached to all nations)
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (A psalm of praise for God's marvelous works)
Colossians 3:1-4 (We have been raised with Christ, and so are to seek heavenly things)
St. John 20:1-18 (Jesus' followers find the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Lord)

What's your favorite thing about Easter? Jelly beans? Marshmallow peeps? Biting the head off a hollow chocolate rabbit? Dyeing eggs for an Easter egg hunt? A new outfit or hat to wear? The big meal after church? While those are all fun, I think the best thing about Easter is our special worship service that gives us the opportunity to sing hymns about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The music and words are cheerful and serve as a welcome change from the minor-key, penitential hymns of Lent. If you have a favorite Easter hymn, I hope it's one we're singing this morning. If not, come back all through April, when we'll continue to sing Easter hymns.

But this morning, I'd like to share with you a contemporary Christian song, “Rise Up,” by the band ‘Cain.’ I heard it on the radio and it spoke to me in a powerfully encouraging way. I hope it will do the same for some of you. But before I do, if you're not familiar with the story of the raising of Lazarus, he's the only person whom Jesus raised from the dead after he'd been in the tomb *four days!* Here's the song:

In the dark and all alone, growing comfortable
Are you too scared to move and walk out of this tomb?
Buried underneath, the lies that you believed
Safe and sound, stuck in the ground
Too lost to be found
You're just asleep and it's time to leave
Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
Rise up, rise up, rise up
Out from the grave like Lazarus
When He said your name, the thing that filled your veins
Was more than blood, it's the kind of love that washes sin away
Now the door is open wide and the stone's been rolled aside
The old is gone, the Light has come, so
Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
You're brand new, the power of death couldn't hold you
Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
Out from the grave like Lazarus
Rise up (like Lazarus) rise up, rise up
Out from the grave like Lazarus
He's calling us to walk out of the dark
He's giving us new resurrected hearts, oh-whoa
He's calling us to walk out of the dark
He's giving us new resurrected hearts, oh

Come on and rise up, take a breath, you're alive now
 Can't you hear the voice of Jesus calling us
 Out from the grave like Lazarus . . .
 Rise up (He's calling you out, no) rise up
 Get me up from the grave like Lazarus
 Rise up (You don't have to stay there)
 Rise up (oh, we hear You calling)
 Rise up (calling us, calling us)
 Out from the grave like Lazarus¹

This Sunday of the Resurrection, we sing for joy because *Jesus* rose up! He did not stay in the grave, and because of this, we who believe in His life, death, and resurrection also will enjoy eternal life with God in heaven. In the words of Psalm 16: “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (verses 9-11).

Jesus didn't fear death because He knew it would not be the end of Him. He trusted God not to abandon Him to the grave or even let His body decay. That confidence proved true. Three days after Jesus died on the Cross He rose from the dead, and we can be certain of that, because there were eyewitnesses: First, Mary Magdalene, the other women disciples, and Peter and John; then two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Later in Jerusalem, the disciples minus Thomas, then the disciples *plus* Thomas. After that, the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and finally, *five hundred* of Jesus' followers at once!

These weren't “Elvis” sightings. The people who saw Jesus alive weren't crackpots. It was the Chief Priests, Elders, and Romans who cracked up. After receiving a report about the empty tomb, they didn't hesitate to come up with the lie that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body. How else could it be missing when they had sealed the tomb and posted a guard? They could not understand that Jesus Christ rose from the dead because He is God in person—and therefore *anything* is possible.

But *why* did Jesus come back to life? He had to prove to everyone that He had defeated sin and death on the Cross. Think of it this way: If there was a rattlesnake in your house and an animal control tech came to get rid of it, would you enter your house if the tech went in but never came out? I don't think so! You'd assume the rattler had won. But what if the control tech went in and came out with the rattler's fangs embedded in his leg? While you might feel sorry for the animal control guy you'd also assume it was safe to go inside. For even though that snake might still be slithering around shaking his rattler, without its fangs it no longer has the ability to inflict damage. The snake has now become more of a nuisance than a danger.²

That's what Jesus did with death and the devil's power over us. He took away death's ability to kill us permanently when He suffered its poisonous bite, and He de-fanged Satan. Yes, death and the devil still rattle around making a nuisance of themselves, but they no longer have power over our souls or lives. Because Jesus rose from the grave, we can be certain that if we believe in Him, we, too will rise from the dead, for just as the Father did not abandon his Son to the grave, God will not abandon us.

The Bible promises us that on the Last Day, our deceased bodies will be glorified. That means we will not grow old, tired, sick, or die for we will live with God forever. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15: “Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies . . . ” (verses 42b – 44a). This is the great good news of Easter, that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has shown us *beyond doubt* that all who believe in Jesus have an eternal future which is secure. So, believe, rejoice, and sing!

Rise up, take a breath, you're alive now. He's calling you out of the grave like Lazarus! Alleluia. *Amen*.

¹ “Rise Up (Lazarus)” lyrics. Songwriters: Madison Cain, Taylor Cain, Logan Cain, Ethan Hulse, Nick Schwarz. Source: Musixmatch, © All Essential Music, Be Essential Songs.

² Adapt. Daniel Habben, “Rejoice With An Ancient Easter Hymn,” 17 March 2008, [SermonCentral.com](https://sermoncentral.com/sermons/rejoice-with-an-ancient-easter-hymn-daniel-habben-sermon-on-heaven-120125), < <https://sermoncentral.com/sermons/rejoice-with-an-ancient-easter-hymn-daniel-habben-sermon-on-heaven-120125>> 15 March 2024. Used with permission.