He Will Make You Rise!

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. E. Stanley Ott
Luke 24:1-12

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Great Hall
Easter is a joy because the whole day is about the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. The whole day reminds us that Jesus is alive right here, right now. As a matter of fact, in the history of the church through the centuries, every Sunday is regarded as a mini-Easter because every Sunday is a reminder that Jesus is alive; he actually exists and cares deeply for you.

My friend Glenn McDonald tells of the time his parents took him, his wife, Mary Sue, and his two brothers and their wives on a cruise in the Caribbean. Glenn said, “My parents said, ‘We will do all sorts of fun things together. On the second day we will even get to stand in line and meet the captain.’ I rolled my eyes and said to Mary Sue, ‘I’ll get us out of that.’ Our first day was a wonderful first day on our cruise and early the next morning, as we were sailing past Puerto Rico at 4:48 am and everyone was sleeping, a disembodied voice over the cabin intercom said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. I am very sorry to disturb you so early in the morning, but we have an urgent concern. We have an unconfirmed report that a passenger has fallen overboard. We have already turned the ship around and initiated a search.’ At that moment, I realized for the first time that the boat was no longer moving. The captain continued, ‘Please go to your room if you are not there at this time, and account for everyone in your party. If anyone is missing, please report their name immediately.’

“Thirty minutes passed. Through our window, we could see the U.S. and Dutch Coast Guards had arrived on the scene. We found ourselves praying, ‘God, if anyone is out there alone in that ocean, may your mercy be upon him.’ Fifteen minutes later, he addressed us again. ‘Ladies and gentlemen, we are looking for Eric Armstrong.’ Two hours later, the sun rose above the Caribbean. Once again, we heard the captain’s voice. ‘Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to tell you we have just found Eric Armstrong. A U.S. Coast Guard Helicopter is at this moment airlifting him to safety.
He appears to be in good condition. Thank you for your cooperation.”"

Glenn goes on to say, “The successful search-and-rescue had a dramatic effect on the rest of the cruise. There were 1,700 guests on the cruise boat and more than 700 crew members. Every passenger now knew: I’m sailing with someone who would turn this ship around in the middle of the night and come looking for me. Who was Eric Arm-strong? Was he a VIP… a U.S. Senator or Congressman… the first mate…someone intimately related to the captain? No, he was a 20-year-old man who, at 4:30 a.m, had apparently fallen off the bow while doing "the Titanic thing" – I’m king of the world! Before dinner on that second day there was no question what I wanted to do. I stood in line to meet the captain. I wanted to shake the hand of the one whom I knew would pull out all the stops to find one lost person, even someone who was doing the wrong thing at the wrong place at the wrong time.””

In a way, every one of us is Eric Armstrong. If a captain of a cruise ship would pull out all the stops to find a boy who’d done the wrong thing at the wrong time, then on a much grander scale, Jesus pulled out all the stops through his suffering, his death on the cross and his resurrection to find and rescue you. We’ve all done the wrong thing at the wrong time, sometimes really wrong, yet the joy of Easter is that Jesus is alive and Jesus comes to you, chooses you, no matter what you have done. He said, My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never die. No one will snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27-28). You can know this for certain: No matter what is happening in your life, no matter what you have done or what is to come, Jesus is the risen Lord who loves you, who will never let you go, and who will make you rise!

The story of the resurrection that David just read to us in Luke is remarkable because it’s such a mix of the wonder of the work of God and the confusion of the disciples. Jesus had predicted he would rise from the dead but, honestly, none of them took that

1 Glenn McDonald The Disciple Making Church FaithWalk Publishing, Grand Haven Michigan, p 21-23
seriously. Dead people don’t come back to life and everyone knew it. The group of women who knew and loved Jesus went to the tomb only to discover the stone was rolled away and Jesus’ body was not there. They were stunned and confused, at which exact second two men appear in blinding, dazzling white clothes. The women are terrified and hit the ground. The two men say, *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.* The women remember Jesus promised this and rush to tell the eleven disciples, who think the women are talking grief crazy talk. That evening they are all gathered together in a locked home, and I love the way Luke describes the scene because none of the disciples ever imagined this would happen: *While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet* (Luke 24:36-40). What I love the most about Easter is that Easter is about Jesus. Jesus is alive right here, right now, speaking to your heart.

Some time ago, I was visiting someone dear to me, who was in the hospital. The doctor came into the room, so I slipped out and went to the hospital waiting room, which had a couple rows of chairs facing the elevators. I was all alone, except for one older gentleman (by which I mean older than me) who was waiting for a doctor to return with a prescription. As people walked past us, this man would nod and offer the warm comment, “Have a blessed day.” After that had gone on for a while and we were alone I said to him, “Now that’s a great word, ‘Have a blessed day,’ because it suggests that you are trusting God who loves us to do the blessing.” The man turned to me with the biggest smile and said, “That’s right!” He went on to say he had opened his life to Jesus.
Christ just within the previous month and he described the power of his experience of Jesus. Then he asked me, “Do you know what blessed means?” I replied, “Well, I have an understanding of it but what do you think it means.” He smiled and said, “It means, ‘He will make you rise!’” I said, “I love that!” At which point the doctor stopped by to give him his prescription. This gracious man pushed the elevator button and when it arrived, he stepped into the elevator and as doors were closing, he looked me in the eye and said, “Have a blessed day.” I smiled and said, “He will make you rise!” and the man was gone. That is the good news of Easter, when you open your heart to Jesus, then God who made Jesus rise will make you rise to be with him.

The message of Luke is one of history and of hope. The history is this. Jesus was raised from the dead. Literally! He lives among us now. That’s history. The hope is that through our trust in Jesus, he will raise us from the dead, too. I love this promise from the Book of Romans: If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you [and the Spirit of God lives in you if you open your heart to Jesus and trust him], If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then He who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit that dwells in you. In other words, if you believe in Jesus, trust him, then God who raised Jesus will make you rise, too!

A few weeks ago, I saw a Facebook post of Melanie, a high school classmate of our son, Lee. Melanie was talking about the death of her dad after a long illness and his very last words. Melanie’s mom is a very outgoing person and loves to talk about her faith. Her dad, Ed, was quieter, active in our church and simply, deeply loved his family. Melanie’s dad was lying back in bed and his hospice nurse was in the room with him when all of a sudden Ed’s eyes opened wide and he said, “Wow, hi Lord.” I love that! Those are the words I look forward to saying! That was a blessed day because Ed experienced the word of hope: he will make you rise!

Do you know that God has been pursuing you all of your life? He has been there for you, loving you, leading you to himself. No
matter what has happened in your life, no matter what is going on at this very moment, Jesus is looking at you with love. He is inviting you to his dance, to his home, to share in his eternal life. He is knocking on the door of your life. The next move is yours. If you let him in, you will find joy!

A few years ago, Dan Taylor published a book of letters he had written to his children. One of those letters was written to his son, Matthew.

“Dear Matthew, When I was in the sixth grade I was an all-American. I was smart, athletic, witty, handsome, and incredibly nice. Things went downhill fast after that, but for this one year at least, I had everything. Unfortunately, I also had Miss Owens for an assistant teacher, who also went to our church. One of the things you were expected to do in grade school was learn to square dance.

“Every time we went to work on our dancing, we did this terrible thing. The boys would all line up at the door of our classroom. Then, one at a time, each boy would pick a girl to be his partner. The girls all sat at their desks. As they were chosen, they left their desks and joined the kids who had honored them with their favor. Believe me, the boys did not like doing this—at least I didn’t. But think about being one of those girls. Think about waiting to get picked. Think about worrying whether you were going to get picked at all!

“Think if you were Mary. Mary sat near the front of the classroom. She wasn’t pretty. She wasn’t smart. She wasn’t funny. She was nice, but that wasn’t enough in those days. And Mary certainly wasn’t athletic. In fact, she had a bad leg and limped when she walked. One day, Miss Owens took me aside and said, “Dan, next time we have square dancing, I want you to choose Mary.” She may as well have told me to fly to Mars. It was an idea that was so
new and inconceivable that I could barely hold it in my head. You mean pick someone other than the best, the most pretty, the most popular, when my turn came? That seemed like breaking a law of nature or something.

“And then Miss Owens did a really rotten thing. She told me it was what a Christian should do. I knew immediately I was doomed because I knew that she was right. It was exactly the kind of thing Jesus would have done. It was bound to be found somewhere in the Bible. I agonized. Choosing Mary would go against all the coolness I had accumulated. I thought, ‘Maybe I will choose last. Then picking Mary will cause no stir. I will have done the right thing, and it won’t have cost me anything.’ You can guess where I was instead—first in line. My heart was pounding—now I knew how some of the girls must have felt. I looked at Mary and saw she was half-turned to the back of the room, her face staring down at her desk. My teacher said, ‘Okay, Dan—choose your partner.’ I remember feeling very far away. I heard my voice say, ‘I choose Mary.’ Never has reluctant virtue been so rewarded. I still see her face undimmed in my memory. She lifted her head, and on her face, reddened with pleasure and surprise and embarrassment all at the same time, was the most genuine look of delight and even pride that I have ever seen, before or since. It was so pure that I had to look away because I know I didn’t deserve it.

“Mary came and took my arm, as we had been instructed, and she walked beside me, bad leg and all, just like a princess. Mary is my age now. I never saw here after that year. I don’t know what her life’s been like or what she’s doing. But I’d like to think she has a fond memory of at least one day in sixth grade, I know I do. Love, Papa”

When I first read that story, I realized right away that while I identified with the boy, Dan, that my name is Mary and your name is Mary, too. There are some lovely and unlovely things in all of us. Some that is unlovely is through no fault of our own and some because we’ve done the wrong thing, in the wrong time at the wrong place! That might lead us to assume that if we were in a room with

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Jesus and he was picking people, that he wouldn’t pick you and he wouldn’t pick me, but the wonderful news about Jesus is that he would pick you and he did pick you! Jesus chooses you! He says, “I knock on the door of your life. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you” (Revelation 3:20). The Lord who loves you simply waits for you to open the door!

If you would love to know the Lord who would pull out all the stops to rescue you, who would pick you out of a crowded room, who will forgive your sin and make you rise, to whom you would like one day to say, “Wow, hi Lord,” you can know him! Just tell him! The words aren’t as important as the attitude of your heart to be open to him and to follow him.

Here is a wonderful, simple prayer you may find helps you to do it: Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life. I confess that you died for my sins and extend to me the unconditional gift of forgiveness. I endeavor, from this moment forward, to live for you and follow you as Lord of my life. I trust that you will transform me into the person you want me to become. Fill me with your Spirit’s presence so that I may share this faith and love with other people. I offer this prayer with gratitude, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never die. No one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:27-28