

EASTER: "RIP-Rise in Power"

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer for Illumination



Living God, it's with joy we celebrate the presence of your risen Word. Enliven and embolden our hearts by your Holy Spirit so that we may proclaim the good news of eternal and abundant life; all through Jesus Christ, our crucified, risen, and reigning Lord. Amen.

Background

It's daybreak, and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are heartbroken--devasted by the death of their Teacher. They make their way to his graveside to pay their respects.

But at the crack of dawn, the light of a new day shines through, extinguishing the darkness of death. Lent is gone, Eastertide is here. The dusk has become dawn.

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSV)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly

and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – "RIP-Rise in Power"

It was 1930. Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin was one of the premier Russian Communist leaders at the time.



He took part in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. His works on economics and political science were influential. He was asked to address a huge assembly on the topic of atheism.

After an hour of methodically dismantling the arguments for the existence of God—he looked out into what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of faith. "Are there any questions?"—Bukharin demanded. A deafening silence filled the auditorium. Then a lone man rose up. He silently looked all around him. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church:

"CHRIST IS RISEN!"

All at once the crowd arose together as one person and their response to the question came crashing like thunder:

"HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

We've got good news this morning, Immanuel: CHRIST IS RISEN!

Respond out loud at home with me: HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Even in the face of the Coronavirus, we stand and defiantly cry out: "CHRIST IS RISEN!"

Easter is so crucial because it reminds us who we are:

We're a resurrection people—and the good news of the risen Christ gives us hope, because his hope is a hope that arises out of death.



Hope—that even though we're having to be physically distant, we're reconciled to God and connected with our brothers and sisters.

Hope—that something lost has been bought back—that in Christ we're redeemed, restored, renovated, and renewed.

Hope—that the war against evil has been won—Christ has the victory, even though the battle continues!

Hope—that resurrection has the last word over crucifixion.

I like how author Anne Lamott put it:

"We're an Easter people living in a Good Friday world."

This spiritual reality is symbolized in the sacrament of baptism:

- Our old self goes under the waters and dies.
- Our new self resurfaces with a cry.
- We're reborn! We're a new creation.

Right now we feel like we're under water and running out of breath, but God will raise us up to the surface again.

In our reading, it was in a state of hopelessness that the two Mary's lives took a dramatic turn—that world history took a dramatic turn.

The stone was rolled back—



—and the Angel of the Lord sat upon the stone... as an exclamation point.

The Roman guards shook with fear like dead men at the appearance of the angel. But the angel's message to the women induced faith, not fear:

Don't be afraid. He's not here. He's been raised!

The tomb is as empty as this sanctuary here this morning!

Go quickly and tell the disciples Jesus has been raised from the dead. Jesus is going ahead of you. There you will find him—*look ahead* of you.

You won't find Jesus *looking back*. You won't find him where you've been before. You won't find him in the grave. Don't back pedal. Don't overthink. Move forward. Be not afraid and go where he is—*ahead of you*.

The women did as the angel said. They left in fear AND joy.

William Faulkner put it this way:

"Be scared," You can't help that. But don't be afraid."

Another word for bravery is going forward, even when you're scared to death. Be scared to life, but just don't be afraid because fear only makes things worse.

We can relate with the fear right now—

Fear of loved ones or ourselves getting sick and suffering alone—maybe never seeing them again. Fear about our job, fear about our savings, fear about the future, fear when all this will end.

These are natural and real feelings. A Hebrew prayer articulates this:

"The world is a narrow bridge, and the important thing is not to be afraid." [source](#)

Easter faith is often a mixture of:

fear AND faith

belief AND disbelief

joy AND hesitation

For those who despair that death has the upper hand—*fear not*.

Easter means that God is and will be victorious over the powers of death.

For those who feel isolated and lonely—*be not afraid*.

Easter means Christ comes to meet us on our path.

For those who despair in the midst of pain or anguish—*take heart*.

You're not alone. Jesus suffers with you in his passion, and Easter means you will rise with him.

Easter reminds us that God has taken one of the worst things in the world, the Roman cross, and refashioned it into one of the best things, the Tree of Life!



As soon as Mary and Mary started moving ahead—Jesus met them in their path. Take that step of faith—and Jesus will be right there.

They came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped.

Jesus had the same message as the angel:

Be not afraid. Go and tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee.

Immanuel, resurrection is a new call to discipleship. "Come," says Jesus, "and follow me—*again!*" Don't linger at the tomb—he's not to be found there. But *you will find* the Man from Galilee—in Galilee!

Rise up! Follow our risen leader! He's been ahead of us every step of the way. Just as Jesus was "going ahead" of the disciples into Galilee, the risen Christ will "go ahead" of us into a new chapter in life. *How could we ever doubt it?*

He'll "go ahead" of us into this scary new COVID-19 world we find ourselves in.

He'll "go ahead" of us when we're forced to move on from a way of life we don't want to leave behind.

He'll "go ahead" of us out of the Ashes of Wednesday, out of the cross of Good Friday, and forever into Easter Sunday.



Immanuel, we're the Church, the body of Christ. We have the guts of Christ—the guts to go ahead to where he's calling us—even if it isn't easy. We have the guts to get up and rise up. We've been given the feet of Christ to go and share the good news. With his feet, we can press ahead to our modern-day Galilees. There's no place we can go, where Christ hasn't already been—waiting for us. Jesus didn't raise us up to do nothing or to be afraid or to rest on our laurels. Jesus raised us up to RISE—to rise to the occasion, to rise above it all.

We read on tombstones: "RIP—Rest In Peace." The world as we've known it is gone. It's over. RIP. But, because of Easter, we have a new RIP—*Rise In Power*. Let the old, RIP, "Rest In Peace." Let the new RIP, "Rise In Power." Let's let it rip, Immanuel! In Christ, let's rise up in power! Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Arise today in the presence of the Father,
In the peace of the Savior,
In the power of the Spirit,
In the Three and in the One.

Arise today in the love of God,
In the forgiveness of God,
In the grace of God,
Given to you to me and to all people.

Arise today to see God in your life:
To meet God in others,
To see him in their lives,
In his love and in his glory.

Arise today journeying in God,
To open the eyes that are blind,
To warm the hearts that are cold,
To bring us all home to God:
That we all may rejoice in him.

*And now may the blessings of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always!*

Amen.

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