

## Arise

### Acts 9:36-43

INTRO:

**Are you really who you say you are?**

We are doubted every day.

Every time we log in.

Every time we swipe.

Every time we try to unlock our phones.

**Are you really who you say you are?**

Yes, here's my password.

Here's my PIN code.

Here's my fingerprint.

We are doubted several times a day.

It's woven into the rhythm of our days. Make up a new password.

Set up a user ID.

Take out your ID card.

**Are you really who you say you are?**

It's a common problem, and an old one.

During his ministry, Jesus was doubted all the time.

**If he was really a prophet, he would know that this woman is a prostitute.**

**If he was really a rabbi, he would wash his hands before he eats.**

If he was really the Messiah, he would be from Bethlehem.

Even while he was dying, he was doubted:

If you are the son of God, save yourself.

**Are you really who you say you are?**

And that's the question that still hangs in the air when it comes to Jesus:

**Is he really who he says he is?**

**Was he really who he said he was?**

The question is not about whether or not he did miracles.

Other prophets before him like Moses and Elijah did miracles.

Other rabbis around the same time period are reported to have done miracles.

It's not about the miracles.

And it's not about the good teaching.

It's not about generosity. It's not about caring for the poor, women, or lepers because other people did and do those things.

**What it all comes down to is this:**

**Did Jesus really rise from the dead?**

Resurrection is not only about what happened to Jesus when he was raised from the dead.

Resurrection continues in the **faith** and **work** of the Church as God continues to defeat death and evil.

Christ is raised.

And we are being raised too.

ME:

*Raising up!*

There's an old British sitcom I watch often on YouTube called "**Bless Me father.**"

There is an episode where the housekeeper asked Father Duddleswell, the parish priest, if he would raise the housekeeping money since it had been years since it had been increased.

So, Father Duddleswell raised the housekeeping money for Mrs. Pring.

He took the small stack of pound notes from the desk and *raised* them in the air and set them back on the desk.

*What a smart aleck priest!*

*It is not what I expected!*

YOU:

**Did you expect that kind of response from a priest?**

**What do you think of when you here the word “arise?”**

We are about to see what can happen with the word “**arise**” when it is said in the Bible and then we can think about how it effects us today.

**Let's pray together first . . .**

GOD:

**Acts 9:36** Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.

**37** At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.

**38** Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

**39** So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

**40** Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.

**41** He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

**42** This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

**43** Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

WE:

We read that at Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha.

**Did you notice, Tabitha is called a disciple?**

She is one of the few women clearly called a disciple.

And Tabitha is a *very good disciple*, because Luke says, “**Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need**”.

*What a wonderful description of a great disciple!*

**I wonder what people would say about me and my discipleship?**

**Do you wonder what they would say about you and your discipleship?**

Maybe I should wonder . . . maybe we all should wonder about this.

Would they say our lives overflow with good works and compassionate works on behalf of the needy”?

All Tabitha’s good work ends when she gets sick and dies.

Many poor widows whom Tabitha helped with her good works stand by her body mourning.

They desperately hold up some garments that she made for them as though the garments had some power to bring her back to life . . . waving them, shaking them, raising and lowering them . . . but nothing happens.

Peter arrives at the side of the body and he looks at the widows and their loving attempts to revive their friend.

He kneels and prays, saying to the dead woman, “**Tabitha, get up, arise!**”

In saying “**get up**” Peter uses the same word that is used to describe Jesus' resurrection.

**The word means to arise or stand up . . . even out of death.**

And Tabitha arises, restored to life.

But this isn't exactly a “**resurrection**” because she eventually died and was buried.

**After Easter it's *impossible* to hear a story like this and not think of the resurrection, though.**

Jesus was resurrected.

After *his* resurrection . . . a good woman is brought back to life by Peter.

It's a strange story.

But perhaps that's part of Luke's point in telling it to us today.

***After Easter, after dead Jesus arises alive, you'd better get used to strange stories!***

After Easter the world is not like the world before Easter.

Before Easter everyone who lived died and the dead stayed dead.

Before Easter poor people are at the mercy of outside forces.

Before Easter there is so much grieving as we say goodbye to those dear saints who die.

But after Easter, after God's great defeat of death in raising Jesus, death doesn't have the last word.

After Easter those who are vulnerable have hope because there is power for good ***let loose in the world.***

After Easter, we are able to have hope that the future is not totally controlled by the past.

This is why the message of what happened in Jesus Christ is “**gospel**” or “**good news.**”

It is good news because what happened in Jesus Christ in his resurrection still happens.

Here.

Now.

You see, Easter is a promise not only that death does not have the last word but also that God will not be defeated by evil and death.

And those disciples who do God's good work in Christ's name will not be defeated.

There will be sickness, setbacks, and even death and mourning.

**But don't you see?**

Those once powerful forces have been dealt a devastating blow.

The great defeater death, has been defeated.

**And so . . . we have hope!**

We see it in ministry as the church, a little body of believers, commissioned by Jesus to be his people in the world.

Here is the church with its global, almost impossible commission, to show Christ and his kingdom in all that we do and say to an unbelieving world.

To be in the church, to be a disciple like Tabitha or Peter, is to experience many disappointments and defeats.

Our church, as faithful as it is, continues like any church of anytime, to fall short of this commission.

But we still have hope.

Tabitha's developing little congregation was up against greater odds than we are in our church.

But they took heart.

They had hope because they heard this story and they believed it to be a true account of what God was really up to in the world.

We see this in the book [THE TRIAL OF JESUS](#).

The character Longinus is based on the centurion in command at the foot of Jesus' cross.

Some of the Gospels tell the story of a centurion who looked up and said, "**This was certainly God's Son.**" In the novel, Longinus returned with his troops from Calvary on Friday.

That evening he was summoned by Pontius Pilate to give his daily report.

When he was finished, Pilate's wife begged him to tell her more about the crucifixion and how the prisoner had died.

After Longinus had finished she said, "**Longinus, do you think he is dead now? Is he dead and gone?**"

"**No ma'am,**" he replied.

"**Then where is he?**" she asked.

"**Let lose in the world, where neither Roman nor Jew will ever stop his truth,**" he said.

That is the truth of the resurrection.

It is our truth, our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, Jesus Christ has been let loose in the word. Anything can happen now.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

**We arise in the faith and work of the Church as God continues to defeat death and evil for Christ is raised and we are being raised too.**

YOU:

**How are you being raised?**

**How can you do more than you already do in the world because Jesus arose from the grave and his power is let loose everywhere in the world and no matter how we or anyone tries, we cannot stop it?**

CLOSE:

Resurrection.

Arise.

In April the Metro Richmond Prayer is based on the theme of the spirit of the resurrection.

We pray for the spirit of the resurrection to wash over all of Metropolitan Richmond, including Ashland, Henrico, Hanover, Powhatan, Charles City, New Kent, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, Petersburg, Prince George, Chester, and Chesterfield.

We pray that the glory of the Lord will rise among us.

Bringing life to dead and broken things and bodies and spirits and souls.

Even when it seems **impossible** for such things to happen.

**How will you allow Jesus and his grace and love to arise in and through your life?**

Not just in your death or even after your death, but right now to arise in your life.

**Are you really who you say you are?**

You are doubted every day.

Every time you log in.

Every time you swipe your card.

Every time you try to unlock our phones.

**Are you really who you say you are?**

You say you believe in the resurrection, **but does your life show that you do?**

**How many hurting people do you pass by every day without a thought?**

**If Jesus is alive and his power is let loose in the world, what can it do through you today, right now?**

**The power of resurrection is let loose in the world, how can we join in with its bringing life to death and light to darkness?**

Let us pray for guidance and wisdom now to arise . . .

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INTRO:

Resurrection. It is not only about what happened to Jesus when he was raised from the dead. Resurrection continues in the **faith** and **work** of the Church as God continues to defeat death and evil. Christ is raised. And we are being raised too.

ME:

*Raising up!* There's an old British sitcom I watch often on YouTube called "**Bless Me father.**" There is an episode where the housekeeper asked Father Duddleswell, the parish priest, if he would raise the housekeeping money since it had been years since it had been raised. So, Father Duddleswell raised the housekeeping money for Mrs. Pring. When asked to do so, he said, "**If you insist.**" And he took the small stack of bills from the desk and raised them in the air and set them back on the desk. *What a smart aleck priest! It is not what I expected!* I figured he would say "**no**" or give her more funds with which she could shop for the groceries.

YOU:

**Did you expect that kind of response from a priest? What do you think of when you here the word "arise?"** We are about to see what can happen with the word "**arise**" when it is said in the Bible and then we can think about how it effects us in our day.

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GOD:

**Acts 9:36–40 (NRSV): 36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." 39 So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He**

**turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.**

WE:

The resurrection of Jesus . . . is what happened to Jesus and to no one else. Many in Israel believed in an **eventual general resurrection** of those who had died in Israel and would be raised in a grand act of God that would set right so much of the wrong that Israel had suffered.

No one believed in the resurrection of an individual. But that is just what the early church claimed from the beginning:

*God raised Jesus, unjustly crucified, from the dead.*

But no one said, “**God raised Jesus from the dead and all of us followers will be raised too**”. That was **revealed** later as the church lived into the truth of the resurrection. In a short period of time, the followers of Jesus said not only that Jesus was resurrected but that they would be resurrected too.

The early church also said that the resurrection was the sign of the beginning of a new age in which resurrection had changed everything. Now that Jesus has been raised, not only WILL we be raised, but in a deep and life changing sense, we ARE being raised too. And to say that we are being raised is not just about when we die.

*It is an act of faith here, now, in this life.*

The resurrection is a sign that the world is being reclaimed and that the forces of death in the world are being defeated. To shout out and to live out the truth, “**He is risen!**” is to make a claim about reality now that Jesus is raised from the dead.

We read that at Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha. **Did you notice, Tabitha is called a disciple?** She is one of the few women clearly called a disciple. And Tabitha is a *very good disciple*, because Luke says, “**Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need**”. *What a wonderful description of a great disciple!*

**I wonder what people would say about me and my discipleship? Do you wonder what they would say about you and your discipleship? Maybe I should wonder . . . maybe we all should wonder about this.**

All that good work ends when Tabitha gets sick and dies. Many poor widows whom Tabitha helped with her good works stand by her body mourning. They desperately hold up some garments that she made for them as though the garments held the power to bring her back to life . . . waving them, shaking them, raising and lowering them . . . but nothing happens.

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But after Easter, after God's great defeat of death in raising Jesus, death is not given the last word. After Easter those who are vulnerable have hope because there is power for good *let loose in the world* that is greater than the powers of evil. After Easter, we are able to have hope that the future is not totally controlled by the past.

This is one reason we refer to the message of what happened in Jesus Christ as “**gospel**” or “**good news.**” It is good news because what happened in Jesus Christ in his resurrection still happens. Here. Now.

You see, Easter is a promise not only that death does not have the last word but also that God will not be defeated by evil and death. And those disciples who do God's good work in Christ's name will not be defeated. Of course there will be sickness, setbacks, and even death and mourning. **But don't you see?** Those once powerful forces have been dealt a devastating blow. The great defeater death, has been defeated. **And so . . . we have hope!**

We see it in ministry as the church, a little body of believers, commissioned by Jesus to be his people in the world . Here is the church with its global, almost impossible mandate, to show Christ and his kingdom in all that we do and say to an unbelieving world. To be in the church, to be a disciple like Tabitha or Peter, is to experience many disappointments and defeats. Our church, as faithful as it is, continues like any church of anytime, to fall short of this mandate.

But we still have hope. Tabitha's developing little congregation, a tiny fringe group on the edge of the almighty Roman Empire, was up against greater odds than we are in our church.

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We see this in the book **THE TRIAL OF JESUS** by John Masefields. The character Longinus was patterned after the centurion in command at the foot of Jesus' cross. Some of the Gospels tell the story of a centurion who looked up and said, "**This was certainly God's Son.**" In the novel, Longinus returned with his troops from Calvary on Friday. That evening he was summoned by Pontius Pilate to give his daily report. When he was finished, Pilate's wife begged him to tell her more about the crucifixion and how the prisoner had died. After Longinus had finished she said, "**Longinus, do you think he is dead now? Is he dead and gone?**" "**No ma'am,**" he replied. "**Then where is he?**" she asked. "**Let lose in the world, where neither Roman not Jew will ever stop his truth,**" he said.

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CLOSE:

See if this story resonates wit you:

They couldn't believe it. For ten years their congregation had been serving food to the homeless. They set out to solve the problem of hunger in their city. They had some generous initial gifts that got the ministry started.

But the problem of hunger and homelessness kept growing. They raised more money, but the money was never enough to fund all that was needed. The more people they fed, the more people who showed up each year looking for food. And this year the board voted to increase their budget by 10 percent. *Ten percent! Are they crazy? They were behind in last year's budget. In fact, they had failed to make the budget every year for the last ten years and they want to raise the budget even higher!*

Of course, after God raised crucified Jesus from the dead, **who knows?** Maybe it's not crazy to expect another resurrection right now even in Hopewell as God shows the hungry homeless — and all of us — what God can do.

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It reminds me of what we see in the book *The Genesis of Liberation*. Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler Jr. explore what they call the "**miracle**" of how many African American slaves came to faith in Christ. For most of them, Jesus was the "**White Man's Savior**." They used Jesus and the Bible to pacify slaves and justify their enslavement.

Miraculously, many African Americans, though not all, became Christians and attributed authority to the Bible. The question that remains is **why**. **Why did enslaved Africans embrace the religion of their captors, who used the Bible to justify the brutal trans-Atlantic slave trade?**

Here is their simple answer:

*They fell in love with the God of Scripture ... In Christ they found salvation from their sins and reconciliation." In the Bible they found not just an otherworldly God offering spiritual blessings, but a here-and-now God who cared chiefly for the oppressed, acting to deliver the downtrodden from their abusers. They also found Jesus, a suffering Savior whose life and struggles paralleled their own struggles.*

*As they came in contact with this God, they found a different reality in him: the reality of Resurrection power. It was the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection that created a community of faith and ... provided slaves with a theology of "resistance." The Resurrection had proved its power; there are Christians—even among African Americans.*

**How will you allow Jesus and his grace and love to arise in and through your life?** Not just in your death or even after your death, but right now to arise in your life.

Let us pray for guidance and wisdom now to arise . . .

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Here is their simple answer: "They fell in love with the God of Scripture ... In Christ they found salvation from their sins and reconciliation." They write that in the Bible they found not just an otherworldly God offering spiritual blessings, but a here-and-now God who cared principally for the oppressed, acting to deliver the downtrodden from their abusers. They also found Jesus, a suffering Savior whose life and struggles paralleled their own struggles.

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