

# Arise!

February 20, 2022  
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*1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 9:36-42; Luke 7:11-17*

Sung) ***Arise my love, arise my love.  
The grave no longer has a hold on you.  
No more death's sting. No more suffering.  
Arise, arise, my love.***

This refrain hooked on somewhere deep in my spirit as I began preparing to preach this morning. And it still hasn't let go! So I invite you to sit in it with me this morning.

(Sung) ***Arise my love, arise my love.  
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Arise, arise, my love.***

I want to tell you a story about a faucet.

I was recently eating lunch in a quaint cafe in Fredericksburg Virginia and though we lingered over lunch, we had many hours of driving ahead of us and so, in a bustle at the end of lunch I rushed to the bathroom for final preparations for the long drive.

The time arrived when I needed to simply and hurriedly wash my hands but there were ... complications.

And I noted a sign taped to the mirror above the sink that read:

***Are you having trouble with the faucet?  
You are not alone.  
Try lifting it horizontally.***

My first thought was that these people were speaking my language. You are not alone. Thank you very much. As I stand here trying to understand what I need to do next, I appreciate that reminder.

And I see that you have offered a clear and precise suggestion. Try lifting it horizontally.

And yet - is that really clear? Does that mean to lift it this way - or this way - or...I mean, it just seems like words couldn't actually fully communicate the reality.

But the attempt, and the clear statement that I was not alone, somehow grounded me as I stood there wondering how I might wash my hands.

My first couple of attempts fell short. And then I managed to turn the water on - just cold water though. It was like a watered-down experience. Not really the full, hot, handwashing experience, but something that approximated it.

Our efforts to read scripture are like this sometimes, aren't they?

The words are instructive but we feel certain we are not fully understanding.

I feel that way particularly about our readings for today.

These passages all have this beautiful resurrection thread:

Look! Your child lives - said Elijah.

Tabitha, arise - said Peter.

Young man, I say to you, rise - said Jesus.

A child, a woman, a man - all called into life. A beautiful resurrection thread that I'm not entirely sure how to handle.

With a little more digging we remember nuances of these stories that add to their power: the child was the child of a foreign widow - powerless and impoverished; the woman, known as both Tabitha and Dorcas, would have been a Greek-speaking Jew who, Dr. Gafney points out, was likely living with enough wealth and privilege to have time to devote herself to the needs of

others; the man was also the son of a widow who would have had nothing without her adult son.

Woven together, these stories tell of resurrection in so many contexts.

In addition to all of the rising up, Elijah, Peter, and Jesus all touch death. Jesus TOUCHES the coffin. This was absolutely forbidden according to the priestly tradition - he would have been contaminated by death, he would have been ritually unclean. But instead of being contaminated by death, Jesus draws forth life.

And so this refrain has its hooks in me - in us:

(Sung) ***Arise my love, arise my love.  
The grave no longer has a hold on you.  
No more death's sting. No more suffering.  
Arise, arise, my love.***

What else, what more than "Rise up!" did you hear in these texts?

Did you catch the mentions of an upper room - both the child and Tabitha are resurrected in an "upper room." It caught my attention that the Last Supper and Jesus' betrayal by Judas are also traditionally understood to have taken place in an upper room, or the Upper Room. These feel like textual EASTER EGGS in this long arch of resurrection.

And Dr. Gafney's notes on these texts draw out from all of them language that has to do with the womb, or guts, or innards. The compassion that compels intervention, that drives Elijah and Peter and Jesus to name and claim resurrection is rooted in the body. It is embodied. Life is drawn forth from the body. This is beautiful and powerful and evokes for me that mother's love that can just will a child to keep breathing.

Except when it can't. Except when she can't. Because this world is full of death.

And so isn't there something unsettling and incomplete about these passages - about the story that one must only call on the divine, or rightly believe, in order to escape death?

Does it mean this? Or this?

I find it easier to say what I don't believe these passages to mean than what I do.

Because they get misused or misunderstood all the time, and that MISS causes a lot of hurt: people thinking that their impending death, or the death of a loved one, is simply evidence of insufficient prayer or lacking faith.

And it seems so clear to me that God doesn't work this way. That our living and our dying are not tests of faith. Are not dependent upon how earnest or fervent our prayers become.

The parent, or child, or partner, or best most beloved friend who died - they died because their body could no longer live in this world. Not because your prayers were insufficient.

You will die. Your body will no longer be able to live in this world - even though you will be covered in prayers of a community who loves you.

And so I am not entirely sure how to turn these texts on. How to draw fresh water from them.

As I fidgeted with them, David reminded me that pastor and theologian Brian McLaren is one of many voices who names resurrection stories "parables." One way to understand resurrection passages is to hear them saying "the kingdom of God is like..."

The kingdom of God is like deep mother-love compassion, guts and innards compassion.

The kingdom of God is like - arise my love.

***Are you having trouble with resurrection?***

***You are not alone.***

***Try this.***

Family of God, we are called into life.

We are called into life in this world, and we are called into life in the divine mystery of what is yet to come.

We are called into life born of mother-love compassion, of guts and innards compassion, of compassion that is rooted in our being.

And family of God - being called into life means being called out of death - out of the grave. Being called into life means being called out of death-dealing traps.

We are called out of relationships, and suffering, and fear, and injustices, and indignities, and inequities - out of this chaos and into life that is born of deep and abiding love.

We are called out of the betrayal of the upper room, and into life as a resurrection people, following a risen Lord.

What graves are trapping you? From which deaths are you called to rise?

To what death must you draw near in order to call others into life?

Will you allow the risen Lord to call you into life in this world and the next?

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