

**“But God raised him up...”**

First UMC of Pocatello  
Juneteenth / Father’s Day  
June 19, 2022

Acts 2:22-36

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**R – Receiving** what only God can give, what God gives so freely. Receiving as a gift what we, on our own, could never achieve or earn. Receiving what can never again be taken away from us: life – new life, *true* life; life at its most expansive and eternal. With a humbled, thankful heart, the Psalmist says, “Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me, and set me in a broad place” (118:5). Karl Barth, theological giant of the twentieth century, called this gift an “impossible possibility.” Pure grace. Again, the psalmist: “You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy” (16:11).

**E – Elusive**, here and then moving on, among us only for a moment. That mysterious presence – that arsonist of the heart – passing through doors, coming alongside as a stranger, offering blessings and forgiveness, convening meals and working miracles, then disappearing from sight. The angel told the women, “He has been raised, he is not here. He is going [on] ahead of you; *there* you will see him” (Mark 16:6 & Matt. 28:7). Ahead, ahead, always ahead of us – luring, enticing, awakening our desire for *more*.

**S – Song** sung from the dark, cramped, stifling bowels of the slave ship; song sung between endless, prickling rows of cotton, taunting tongues of tobacco leaf, sharp spears of sugar cane; song sung from the cold gray prison cell; song sung in the midnight hour, in the secret clearing, with the freedom star overhead. Song, whose rhythm and breath and intonation shake the foundations of every enslavement; song by which many peoples, stripped of home, language, family, are drawn together into a discovery of integrity, resilience, victory; song cutting through the Great Silence. Song that sustains.

**U – “Up,”** Loren says, grasping my pants, or reaching up from his highchair. “Out,” he says, when finished with his bath or his crib. “Up! Out!” Wanting a higher perspective, a reassurance of closeness, a liberation from necessity, routine; a desire for touch, attention.

**R – Rubric** for our every thought, word, and deed; measure of our faithfulness. In our earnest striving, are we sowing seeds of life, nurturing the new shoots of life, weeding around the edges of life, celebrating the fruit of life? Are we contributing to the common good, witnessing to the universal love of Christ, lifting up those who have been brought low, interceding for those caught in the crosshairs of society?

**R – Returning** to the Earth, to creation. Returning every day through our alert presence and gratitude; returning one day, completely, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Final exhalation of carbon and oxygen; dissolution of calcium and iron. The metal and the rock that frame us, the rivers that flow within us, the swirling energy and electricity of countless unseen particles, the microbiomes – surrendered, offered to once again become the building blocks of life. Our parting gift. Our eternity.

**E – Eiseley**, Loren Eiseley, the old naturalist, down on his knees on the shore of some lake, shaking his head with a chicken bone between his teeth, to the squealing delight of a fox cub. Reflecting on that moment, he urges that we must find a way to “turn the arrow back,” the arrow of time; we must find a way to run time backward to a former condition of innocence, to recover the child within us who will entertain fox cubs, who will admit to the miracle and magic of life. He knows it is not possible to go backward in history, but believes it is possible in the mind, as an act of imagination. We must not careen forward, crucifying through neglect or abuse the parts of ourselves most aglow with the purity and simplicity of God. We must seek them, reclaim them. Then we will not be so quick to indulge our anger, our fear, our sadness.

**C – Caution; no, catastrophe; no, condemnation!** – for the powers and principalities of this world; for all the self-raised, self-inflated, self-absorbed, self-glorifying, self-sufficient persons and systems of the world. Caution, catastrophe, condemnation for every agent of Negation; every idol; every act, pattern, policy that denies the “very goodness” of God’s creation by nailing it to a cross. God has circumscribed the domain of death; God has shown where its possibilities end. All our ambitions hang on the cross. All our slogans hang on the cross. All our idolatrous images, overblown metaphors, all our plans to take the name of God in hand so that we can make something of ourselves – they hang on the cross.

**T – Transfiguration** of period to comma + conjunction; transfiguration of the cross’s finality into the breath, the pause, of Holy Saturday; into the explosive defiance of Easter: “You crucified and killed him, but God raised him up, having freed him from death.” *But God.*

**I – In** my mind there is a white, two-story house with black shutters; there is a scummy creek where my grandfather, leaning over a rock, shows me quartz, tadpoles, bugs walking on water. In my mind there is a Whippoorwill’s song, a rhythm of waves, a flash of pure, overwhelming gratitude; there is a dog startled by a dolphin two feet away in the shallows. In my mind there is a man condemned to die reciting a memorized Maya Angelou poem, “And Still, I Rise.” There are dozens of songs, a thousand manifestation of myself; there are the best and worst things I’ve ever done or left undone – everything more permanently held by the gray thundercloud in my skull than they ever were, or ever could be, in the flowing river of time. I remember them. They live forever.

**O – Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.**

**N – *nihilo***, Latin for “nothing,” part of the Christian doctrine *creatio ex nihilo*, “creation out of nothing.” The nothing – the formless chaos of a just-born universe; the confused knot of the self; the violent mess of history and society; the invisible and overlooked and silenced masses – out of these nothings God makes something; out of these nobodies God makes Somebodies; God loves turning Nos into Yesses.

Resurrection.

What does it mean to you?

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It’s important for each of us to be able to answer that question in the language of the heart, drawing upon the things we have experienced.

For resurrection – the resurrection of Jesus – was what the first preacher was called to preach. It is the turn, the hook, the good news of the first Christian sermon. “You crucified and killed him, but God raised him up, having freed him from death.” Those two words, “but God,” are the beating heart of every act of Christian proclamation, the core of every testimony. They God’s loving intervention into our lives, God’s mercy and power that can fundamentally change our circumstances. At the end of every path, at every locked door, in the deepest most impenetrable darkness, there is for us those words, *but God*.

On a day that our culture has marked as Father’s Day, we remember how our Heavenly Parent has gone to every length to break down what separates us from

the fullness of life. On a day handed down to us as Juneteenth we remember a community whom the demons of history have done everything in their power to crucify, whom God has raised up, is still raising up, not only by legal freedom, but by the gift of an unshakeable inner assurance, a piercing vision for what life could be, manifested in those freedom songs, “I hear music in the air,” “Let my people go,” “We shall overcome.”

Friends, if you have found yourself thinking, “I can’t get through this. I can’t move beyond this. All my reference points are gone, the ground under my feet is unfamiliar, there’s no sign to point the way,” there is a *but God* even for you.

Come to Jesus, the one who knows what it is to die, yet the one death could not hold. Come to Jesus, the one in whom the power of God lives forever. Come to Jesus, whom God has made both Lord and Messiah. Come to Jesus, the key, the hinge, the light up ahead.

Be raised in him.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.