

## PSALM 118 (Selections)

Leader: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, His steadfast love endures forever!

**People: Let Israel say, His steadfast love endures forever.**

Leader: Let the house of Aaron say, His steadfast love endures forever.

**People: Let those who fear the Lord say, His steadfast love endures forever.**

Leader: The Lord is my strength and my might; He has become my salvation.

**People: I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.**

Leader: This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

**People: I thank you have you have answered me and and have become my salvation.**

Leader: The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

**People: This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.**

**All: This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

## MATTHEW 28:1-10

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 the women 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."

## **RISE AND SHINE!**

### **Psalm 118 (responsive reading, selections) Matthew 28:1-10**

"Rise and shine!" OMG, how I used to hate hearing my mother's sunny voice in the morning waking me out of a deep slumber. I would groan and cover my head with the pillow and mumble under my breath, "Go away, let me sleep." But my mother was pure German and Persistence was her middle name. "C'mon now, let's get a move on!" while she threw open the curtains letting in the unwanted early light. There is just nothing worse than a cheerful person breaking through the fog between sleep and waking. When I became a parent, I was never that pleasant in rousing my sons. I would just burst into their rooms and growl, "Get your butt outta bed!"

Did you ever consider what an important role rising plays in our lives? When I make bread, I have to wait for the dough to rise. Pulling yourself up from a supine position raises you from a vulnerable state to one of readiness. You rise to the challenge. You rise up against tyranny. You raise money for a worthy cause. You rise over your defender to grab a rebound or sink a twenty-foot jump shot. Rising lifts, us; it elevates us to a higher plane of being.

And what are we here to celebrate today? Jesus' rising from the dead. Can you possibly conceive of any act more powerful than that? It matters not whether you consider this to be a literal, historical occurrence or whether you believe it is symbolic or metaphoric. It represents divine intervention into human affairs with a promise of victory over death and decay. It is the ultimate act of God's love for God's creation. As Paul says in Romans: *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the whole creation,*

*but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved.*

So today we look to discover the significance of the Easter event for our own lives as we await the redemption of our bodies. What implications does Jesus' rising have for us? How do we make it more than just a proclamation? How do we give it teeth by implementing it in our every day lives? This is our Easter question for today.

Rising is the central theme of the Easter event. To resurrect means to bring something back to life. In a very real way, we all experience this each morning as we are resurrected from sleep into one of wakeful activity. It happens daily on that most basic of levels. And on a much grander scale, it involves our mortality and our hope for life beyond the physical which inevitably ends in death. There will come a day for all of us when we do not rise or shine.

For that event, we must place our trust in God and the promises made to us through Christ's sacrificial offering of himself. And I can and I do proclaim it, but so what? If it does not translate into something real for us on the level of our current existence, where is the meaning? If Easter is about rising, then beyond getting up in the morning, how do we participate in the resurrection? Rising is not passive. It requires energy and intention. It is purposeful.

Sometimes it involves lifting ourselves from the muck of life. It may be recovering from an accident or a serious illness, or adjusting to a new and undesired reality, or overcoming a poor decision that derailed us from our dreams, or all of the catastrophes, large and small, which happen to everyone at some point along the trail.

In 1968, a man staggered into Nickajack Cave near Chattanooga. The cave is known for its long, winding tunnels and it is easy to become lost in them. The man wanted to become lost. Carrying only a flashlight, he walked deep into the cave with a singular intention—to lie down in the darkness and die. His life was in ruins, he was exhausted, his body ravaged by years of drug abuse.

But as he lay on the floor of the cavern waiting to breathe his last, he felt a slight breeze of fresh air and saw a faint light. In his own words, he said, “I felt something very powerful start to happen to me, a sensation of utter peace, clarity, and sobriety. He rose to his feet, stumbled toward the light and miraculously found his way out of the cave. His name was Johnny Cash.

You see, the meaning of Easter is not death, but life. Who is here today because they wish to die? I can assure you that it is not me. But is it simply enough to go through the motions of living? I want to do more than just get up in the morning. I really do, Mom, I want to rise and I want to shine. Sometimes I just have trouble getting going. You can rise without shining. But where is the joy?

So how can we add luster to our rising? Consider for a moment one of my heroes—and I don’t have many—LeBron James. Some of you may be rolling your eyes right now, but hear me out. While it is true that I am an unabashed Cleveland Cavaliers fan and for a number of years, LeBron was on my anti-hero list after he deserted the Cavs for South Beach. But my admiration for him goes way beyond his incredible basketball skills. He definitely shines brightly on the court, but in my opinion he shines even more brightly off of it.

Several years ago, he created his Family Foundation for the explicit purpose of helping inner city kids to stay in school and get their education so they can rise up and become responsible, contributing members of society. Each year, he adopts 6th graders from Akron’s City Schools who must sign a Promise that they will attend school, work to get good grades and never utter the words, “I can’t.” The organization then follows and supports these kids all the way through high school and if they graduate, through college as well. For upon completion of their high school degree, they can opt to attend the University of Akron with their entire four years of tuition and fees paid for through a partnership between the University and the James’ Foundation.

There are currently 1100 students in the program and LeBron has thus far contributed \$42M dollars to this project. And he is involved on the personal level. There have been

numerous occasions when a student has been reported to be backsliding on their homework that they have received a personal call from LeBron. You'd better answer!

So the Foundation is a powerful force in helping to raise these inner city school children up by their own bootstraps to eventually become solid members of society and predictably to help revitalize the city of Akron.

But it doesn't stop there. Because as they rise, the "I Promise" members are also expected to shine. The Foundation sponsors numerous events throughout the year to help clean up neighborhoods and parks, donating their time and energy to produce good for the greater community. And in doing so, they earn credits which they can spend at LeBron's "I Promise" shop which is loaded with stuff like headphones and backpacks that every kid covets. And they just keep it going forward. Last summer, Cedar Point hosted the Family Reunion attended by 6000 sponsored children and their families.

In order to shine, we do not have to be wealthy. What we have to be is committed. We have to have a vision. In the early 90's, the St. Louis neighborhood of South City had deteriorated sharply due to a stagnant economy, population decline and crime. And because property values were depressed, Bosnian refugees started settling there. Then thousand of volunteers helped them to renovate abandoned houses and other buildings. They started businesses and brought skilled labor back to the neighborhood. As the area rose to new life, the refugees rose up as well replacing discouragement with hope, finding opportunities where none had previously existed, experiencing peace instead of war, life instead of death. As someone wrote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

This is what Easter is about. And the beautiful thing is that each of us can plug in in totally unique ways. You can be a deacon in the church; you can serve on Session; you can volunteer to help feed the homeless, you can donate time, money or both to causes that help to raise up other people. you can make it as simple as vowing to put a smile on everyone's face

whom you meet today. It does not have to be difficult. But it does have to be intentional. And the best part of it is that at the same time you will be raising up yourself and having a resurrection experience that makes Easter come alive and be a reality in your heart any day you choose.

So as individuals and as a worshipping community, let us Rise and Shine because **HE IS RISEN!**

Reverend Thomas Dunlap April 16, 2017