

Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 8
You Have Drawn Me Up!
Psalm 30

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Easter Sunday, March 31, AD 2024
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Why do dreams do this to us? You're going to school. You have your books and your lunch. But when you arrive, you realize you forgot to put on your clothes. Ridicule follows. Or, you're in a big city that you don't know well. You turn down the wrong street, and suddenly people are coming out of the shadows to hunt you down. You run for your life. And run. And run. Or, you've done something horrible, forgotten something crucial, chosen something ridiculous. And now your job is over; your family is broken; a loved one is gone. The emptiness of loss and failure overwhelms you with tears. Then you wake up. Heart pounding. Breathing rapidly. Where am I? Wait. I'm in my bed. In my home. No one is chasing me. I

haven't yet done anything so terrible. I'm here, and it's ok. The relief floods over you. Never did the ordinary seem so joyful.

Imagine Jesus waking up in the cave that serves as his tomb. Once again his heart beats. He takes a deep breath. The terrible struggle to lift his chest to get air is over. No pain as he deeply inhales sweet oxygen. He feels relief. The nerve endings close to his skin no longer scream for being exposed by ripped flesh. He's whole. The stone has been rolled away. Early dawn light faintly illuminates the cave. Before he sits up, Jesus raises his hand in front of his face. He wiggles his fingers, and feels the wonder of being alive. He thinks of his loved ones. John and Mary Magdalene who stayed by his cross. Simon Peter the knucklehead whose courage gave way. His mother, oh his dear mother, for whom this was all so hard. He wants to find them. But wait. First he must thank his Father. The plan worked. Jesus died and yet he is alive.

Of all the Scripture embedded in his brain, one psalm rises to awareness. He prays with ancestor David this song of deliverance.

I will extol you, O LORD [my Father],
For you have drawn me up.

O LORD my God, [my Father], I cried to you for help
And you have healed me.

O LORD [my Father],
You have brought up my soul from Sheol.
You restored me to life
From among those who go down to the pit...
You have turned for me my mourning into dancing.

And now Jesus feels ready to dance. Ready to go forth and show himself alive. The nightmare of death has passed. Easter dawns. Jesus Christ has conquered death. Can you see him skipping from the tomb? Twirling? Raising his arms in praise? This is the center point of all history. The dead Jesus lives.



As we take a few minutes to reflect on the meaning of Easter, I'd like to look more closely at the words used in Psalm 30. David wrote, "You have drawn me up." The word literally refers to drawing up fresh water from a well. Three thousand years ago and still today in many places, people get fresh water by letting down a bucket on a rope into the well. Down the dark shaft, life-

giving water awaits. The well, of course, is too sheer and too deep to climb down yourself. If you fall into the well you might never get up. The bottom of a well is a deathly place. But we can draw up life, precious water, from the deep places of the earth. David, and then Jesus, considered God's deliverance from death to be a drawing up from the dark well of death to daylight and life. In the case of Jesus, what came back to the world is now resurrection, living water, that gives us eternal life.



Psalm 30 also uses more dramatic words for where Jesus went and how he got out. We read "You have brought up my life from Sheol." This is the place of the dead. The underworld. Pictured as the deeps of the earth.

The place under the bottom of the sea. The ancients knew as well as we do that you can't really go cave diving and find the realm of the dead. But as a word picture, Sheol depicted death as a place so far down that no one comes back. David also uses another word picture: the pit. A deep crevice in the earth into which one discards garbage and also carcasses. If you fall into the pit you will surely die and join the bones already at the bottom. People can't climb out of such a pit on their own. Just so, we cannot simply come back from the dead.

Until Jesus. What David wrote as exaggeration, Jesus experienced literally. *You have brought up my life from the dead!* You have restored me to life, made me alive again when I was discarded in the pit of death. LORD God, my Father, you sent the Spirit to raise me!

Here's the glorious news today. The resurrection of Jesus is a unique event in history. It really happened. Once for all. But, our promised future is that one day, we too will rise from death and step into resurrection bodies. Death does not have the last word. Broken, decayed, exploded, emaciated, decimated bodies will be remade. But even more, and this is more urgent for us today, the power of Jesus' resurrection works in us spiritually now. One day, literally, we will rise with him into bodies outfitted for resurrection life. But now, right now, we can know the spiritual power of his rising.

It usually begins with some form of dying. Life as we've known it ceases to be. The nightmares become real. Let's consider some common ones:

- I experience the loss of a dear one. I don't know how to carry on in her absence. Every memory, especially the good ones remind me she's gone.
- I've gotten myself in trouble. I'm in too deep. Such a screw up, such a tangled mess that I can't climb out. I'm in the pit.
- I've suddenly come awake to how self-focused I've become. Living only for me. Ignoring the people who care about me. Everything I've been working for seems now like wasted time. How can I start to live again?
- I've been hurt by others so deeply that my pain has turned to bitterness. I cannot let go of this anger. I cannot stop blaming and unforgiveness is eating me alive.

These deaths seem forever. Like it will never get better. Like it's too late. But our Psalm, a psalm based on resurrection, tells a different story:

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

There's no ridiculous pretending that weeping won't come if you trust in God. It will come. It certainly did for Jesus. He cried out on Good Friday and seemed not to be heard. We cannot escape these deep waters and slippery pits. It is the way of the world since the fall. It is also the way of God to unite us to Christ Jesus in his death so that he can unite us to Christ Jesus in his rising.

These terrible pains, these days of falling into dark wells, get used by our gracious Father to create resurrection hope in us. They are not punishments. Our Father does not delight in them with some perverse pleasure in our suffering. But he has provided a way that they need not destroy us. In fact, our broken hearts can open a path to becoming compassionate people. Our losses, in time, can create hearts filled with gratitude. The wrongs done to us can turn from bitterness to the joy of giving forgiveness. Uniting what has been done to us to the cross of Jesus, we can find freedom so fresh it feels like resurrection. Our failures can lead us to such dependence on Christ that we watch him restore the years eaten by the locust (Joel 2: 25). He makes us new, drawing us up from all the thousand ways of death. He restores us from the pit.

How do we get in on this? It begins by deciding to trust the news. We make a move toward Jesus in faith. The unbroken witness of the people of Jesus for two thousand years is that his tomb is empty. Jesus is risen. The stunning, beyond hope news is true. Trust it.



And then, there is something else to do. Something to do with entrusting ourselves to the risen Jesus. My fellow pastor from another century once had a straight talk with his own sorrowing heart. I'll paraphrase him, "Arise sad heart. If you do not pull away, Christ's resurrection may be yours. Do not by hanging down, break from the hand that as it rises, raises you!" If you've ever cared for toddlers, you know they don't always go where you lead. In fact, a petulant toddler may well strive to yank his hand away from you. Even if you're leading him to get ice cream! I know well the feeling of walking hand in hand with a little one who suddenly pulls down on my hand with all his weight trying to get away. That is my heart. Too often, I want to stay in sadness. I want to stay in rebellion. I want to stay in bitterness. I want to stay in myself. But I have to have a straight talk with myself: "Arise sad heart! Arise bitter heart! Arise guilty heart!"

Arise lost soul! Arise self-absorbed soul!” Do not by hanging down break from the hand that as it rises, raises you!



Let’s look at it one more way. The Father drew Jesus up out of the waters of death. Now the risen Jesus desires to draw each of us up to himself. To pull us out of the waves, just as Jesus took Peter by the hand when he was sinking. I love the way the show *The Chosen* depicted this. After Jesus brings Peter back to the boat, he embraces the broken-hearted disciple. “Don’t let me go,” Peter

says, weeping into Christ’s chest. “Please, don’t let me go,” he pleads over and over. This is about so much more than his failed moment in the waves. “Don’t let me go.” It’s an existential cry. Jesus answers Peter as he holds him, “I’ve got you. I’ve got you.”

On this Easter morning, the rising Jesus extends a hand to us. I hear him say, “Come with me! The Father has drawn me up out of the pit, out of death, out of the waters. Come up with me. I’ve got you by the hand. Don’t pull away. Don’t try to break my grip. Let me bring life into all this dying. Come up with me now.”

We have a tradition on Christmas Eve and Easter of praying a prayer of freeing faith. It’s another way to say, “Do not by hanging down break from the hand that as it rises, raises you.” Will you say it with me? Will you let him draw you up to more of his resurrected life today?

Lord Jesus, how you rejoiced to see that everything sad was coming untrue. Your death became a resurrection. And now you reach out your rising hand to me! Give me courage to accept your grip. Give me faith to stop squirming away from you. Draw me out of the pit. Raise me up with you. Turn my mourning into dancing. Even today!

Art: Gaudenzio Ferrari, *Christ Rising from the Tomb*, 1546

Kelsey and Jennifer Lightweave *The Finisher of Faith*, contemporary