***RISE AND SHINE!***

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Texts: Isaiah 60:1-3 and Acts 9:32-43

How do you begin your day each day? When I was growing up most of my days seemed to begin with “Rise and shine!” That was my mom’s unnecessarily cheery greeting each morning – *Rise and shine!* Rain and fog outside, snow pelting down, no matter, *Rise and shine!* She was a sort of maternal alarm clock letting us know that it was time to get out of bed and get on with the day. On this Mother’s Day I have fond memories of my mom, but it has only been with the passage of time that I have come to appreciate her morning greetings! At least it was better than the friend whose mom was one of those morning persons who could not understand why anyone would want to sleep in and so would come in Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m. saying, “*I need those sheets from your bed!*” and pull them right out from under her, and then return at 7:30 saying, *“Here are your sheets. Time to make your bed!”* And that may not be as bad as the fellow who told me that as a boy he once got up and 6:00 a.m. to go to the bathroom and when he came back to bed, he found his grandmother had made his bed! For some folks rising is the hard part and for some there is little shining until that first cup of coffee has done its work. How do you begin your day each day?

Some people begin each day with prayer. They might give thanks for a good night’s rest or ask help to make it through the day or pray for someone who has been weighing on their mind, but each day begins with a prayer. Charles John Vaughn offers a suggestion for ending each of those morning prayers, “*Lord, that which we have prayed against this morning, suffer us not to have done before the evening*.” John Madden, who was a member of the church in Richmond and was a football coach long before his namesake coached in the NFL, began each day by saying, “Good morning, Lord!” before his feet hit the ground! Before you rise and shine, or at least rise, what prayer might you offer each new day?

“*Lord, whatever this day may bring, Thy name be praised*.” That was the prayer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the dawn of another day in his cell in a Nazi prison camp where he awaited execution. It is a bold prayer for a condemned man who knew not whether the day would bring life or death – “*Lord, whatever this day may bring, Thy name be praised*.” It is hard to imagine the faith it took to offer that prayer in that grim place in the face of death. It is one thing to awake to a glorious sunrise and to commit the day’s praise to the Lord. It is quite another to stare into the eyes of death from a prison cell and offer the same prayer. Bonhoeffer didn’t distinguish one from the other; he offered God praise each day, come what may. Whatever this day may bring, *Lord, whether good or bad,*

*healing or pain,*

*success or failure,*

*life or death,*

*Thy name be praised.* It is perhaps easier to offer that prayer if we anticipate the good, but it is perhaps more important for us to offer that prayer when we anticipate the bad. *In all things, Lord, Thy name be praised*.

I wonder if that was the prayer with which Peter began the day in Lydda when he healed Aeneas and raised Tabitha. Did he begin the day with a prayer that God might be praised in whatever happened that day, not knowing whether it would be something great or small, good or bad, faithful or unfaithful? The book of Acts describes some of the grand things that led to praise of the Lord in the first days of the church – the power of Pentecost, the conversion of Paul, the healing of Aeneas, the revival of Tabitha. Miracles all, these were signs of the continuing power of God at work in the midst of the faithful remnant of disciples who continued the work of their Lord. But Luke also describes for us some of the darker moments – the stoning of Stephen, the conflict in Jerusalem, the jailing of Peter, the shipwreck of Paul. The common thread that runs through all these events is the growth of faith – amid the good and the bad, the triumphant and the tragic, people came to believe in the Lord. The numbers grew, the word spread, and the Lord was praised!

How tempting it must have been for Peter to accept the praise for himself! In similar movements the demise of a leader gave rise to a new leader who took the place of the deceased. Peter might well have laid claim to that role at the death of Jesus. He worked miracles – he healed the sick, he raised the dead. He was the rock – the *petros* – upon which the church would be built. Yet Peter never claimed the credit; he always pointed to the risen Christ as the power by which he did what he did. When Peter raised Tabitha from her death bed, saying, “*Tabitha, arise!*” he did not do so by his own power, but only after prayer, so that her resuscitation led many to believe in the Lord. When he healed Aeneas of his paralysis, Peter didn’t shout, “Look what I have done!” he declared, “*Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed!*” so when people were moved to faith, it was faith in Jesus Christ, not in Peter the worker of miracles. Whatever this day may bring, Lord, **your** name be praised!

Now Tabitha, whose name was Dorcas in Greek perhaps explaining why she preferred the Aramaic name, was one of those disciples whose life was a living testament to her faith. She is described by Luke as a disciple, confirming that men **and** women were among those who followed the risen Christ as disciples! “*She was full of good works and acts of charity*,” writes Luke. What a wonderful description of a faithful life! I wonder if Luke would choose similar words to describe you. Is that your legacy – good works and acts of charity – or is it something else, something perhaps more notable in the world’s eyes than in God’s eyes? For two thousand years Christians have remembered Tabitha, sometimes by her Greek name Dorcas, as that woman full of good works and acts of charity; in my home church there was a Dorcas Circle which was a women’s group dedicated to Bible study and service. In life, Tabitha was a shining example of faith and faithfulness; in death and then resuscitation she became a shining example of the power of God still at work in the world after Jesus’ ascension. Let there be no doubt, says Peter and all those followers of the risen Christ, including Tabitha, it is Jesus who heals, Jesus who saves, and it is the risen Jesus who continues to heal, to save, to bring good news, to offer hope to the world, and to work in our midst through the power of the Spirit in their day and in ours.

The greatest compliment I ever received as a preacher came from one of our members who told me, “When I hear you preach, I don’t think, ‘what a great preacher’ (no surprise there); I think ‘what a great God!’” That is what preaching ought to be – something that points beyond the preacher to the God who inspires the message. It is what all our lives ought to be – lives that point beyond ourselves to the God whom we serve, the God who has blessed us with the gifts with which we serve. The work we do is our offering to God, and perhaps the highest compliment you might receive is not “what a great teacher or doctor or worker or student or person,” but “what a great God you serve!” What difference might it make for you to approach each day with a commitment to give God the glory! Before you take the bows or accept the praise, remember where the praise belongs – whatever this day may bring, Lord, Thy name be praised!

Sometimes it is a great mystery how that might happen. Some days seem doomed to offer God little praise. Some days seem to better reflect a prayer of “*Lord, let me not embarrass you this day!*” And the truth is that some days we do embarrass God, or grieve God, or disappoint God – that is the sin that we somehow can never quite shake. Yet faith assures us that even from such disappointments, God can bring some good. Even in tragedy, the Lord’s name may be praised. That is the enduring witness of the Resurrection – from the ashes of death, God can bring hope. To a man eight years lame, God can bring healing. To Tabitha dead and gone, God can bring the breath of life. To a sinner undeserving of grace, God can bring forgiveness. For, with God all things are possible!

It is that hope that sustains us in times of trouble, that hope that buoys us in the depths of despair, that hope which can give rise to Bonhoeffer's prayer from the Nazis’ death row: *Lord, whatever this day may bring, Thy name be praised!* We have that hope! It is hope in the Christ who is crucified yet risen. It is hope that we proclaim in the breaking of bread and sharing of a cup. It is hope that is tangible in baptism promises as water is splashed on the head of a child. It is hope that we hold at the dawn of each new day as we rise. Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the day after that, do not just rise grumpily to start the day; do not rise and despair at the state of the nation and world. Rise and shine brightly, shine faithfully, shine lovingly, shine hopefully for all the world to see. For God is still at work in our midst in wild and wonderful ways! So, to paraphrase my mom in the words of the children’s song: Rise, shine, and give God the glory, glory – children of the Lord! Amen