

Stretching exercises... A recent study said “stretching just feels good.”

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It had been a difficult week for Jesus.

- He went to the Temple to worship, and the place was noisy with business people doing their business in the Temple, rather than worshipping.
  - Then Jesus sat down to have a special meal with his friends, and one of those he had called as a disciple left the table to betray him.
  - Then Jesus led his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the way Jesus had to tell Peter that he would deny him three times. Later that night it came true – the boldest of all the disciples denied even knowing Jesus.
  - Then Jesus was arrested and went before Pilate twice, King Herod once; he went before ruthless soldiers, mocking crowds – the crowd invited Pilate to have him crucified, and he was.
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It had been a most difficult week for Jesus. If it was any of us – any of us – it would have been the end.

Betrayal and rejection tear us down, suffering and abuse destroy us, and death by crucifixion... That would have simply been the end of us – literally. End of story, end of hope, end of life...

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But we are here on this beautiful morning because it was not the end of Jesus. Quite the contrary, it was the beginning of a new day. Which is why I wanted us to stretch.

The Bible says Jesus rose from the dead. That is not for the Bible a nice symbolic phrase. It is not a poetic twist to simply inspire the heart. The Bible reports it as a literal truth: Jesus rose from the dead.

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- Women who knew Jesus saw him alive that Easter morning.
- Men who had traveled with him saw him that Easter night
- A group of 500 saw him. 500 is all of us who will be gathered here in worship this morning at our Easter services. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said most of those 500 were still alive. Any of those 500 could have said, “No, it

is not true. I was just caught up in the moment. It was not really true. I did not really see Jesus alive.” But there is no disclaimer. 500 saw Jesus alive.

So the life story of Jesus goes on. We by faith believe in the resurrection: Jesus rose from the dead.

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What changed when Jesus rose on **that morning?** What changed when Jesus opened his eyes, took a breath, and left that tomb?

The Bible says this is what changed on that morning: *“Jesus was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

[Romans 1:4]

What changed on that resurrection morning?

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### **1. Resurrection: a new day of orderliness.**

Orderliness, you ask, scratching your head? What does that mean? Well, it has to do with those linens Jesus was wrapped in when he was placed in the tomb.

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The Gospels of Matthew and Mark tell us that the women looked into the tomb and saw the empty place where Jesus had been.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that the women looked in the tomb, and that Peter later looked in and saw the linens which Jesus had been wrapped in.

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But the Gospel of John – ahhh, the Gospel of John adds an interesting touch to what happened that morning.

The Gospel of John tells us that two disciples looked into that empty tomb, and they saw the linens Jesus had been wrapped in over here... And the material that had wrapped Jesus' head had been unwrapped, then rewrapped, and laid over here...

That picture of orderliness says something to me. It says that Jesus rose to a new day with order and purpose.

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Let me ask you: when you get up in the morning, how do you arise? When I have had a stressful and anxious night my covers going flying! It is an outward expression of my inner life and thoughts – “I hate this new day!”

But on days when I am ready to face the music of the new day – indeed I awake already whistling the music of the new day – then I get up ready to go.

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Jesus rose in that tomb, not anxious or scared or uncertain. He rose and placed the linens wrapping his body over here... He unwrapped the linens from his head and rewrapped them and left them over here... That is the picture I see – purposefulness, orderliness.

- Jesus rose with the intention of seeing Mary and reassuring her.
  - Jesus rose with the purpose of visiting those two disciples on the Emmaus road, who had such pain and doubt in their hearts – he was going to comfort them.
  - Jesus rose and decided he was going to have to teach Thomas how to trust.
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Tomorrow Easter is going to be over. Right? Tomorrow work begins again and the phone will ring and the emails will come flying in – the pressure-cooker will be on again.

Tomorrow the bonnets will be put away and the bunnies will be history and the leftover ham and potatoes for supper tomorrow night will have lost much of their flavor from the first time around.

Tomorrow Easter is going to be over – or is it? Will the Jesus who puts aside his linens in an orderly way still be in your life to bring his order and purpose?

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Jesus is alive and he can do so many things for you this week. Here is one: Jesus can help you see clearly.

1. Need a friend? Jesus rose from the dead and he helped Mary see that she still had a friend.

2. Need a do-over? Jesus rose from the dead and he helped Peter see that he was forgiven for denying him.
3. Need to overcome doubts? Jesus rose from the dead and he helped Thomas to face his uncertainties.
4. Need to change the direction of your life? He rose from the dead and he helped those two disciples who were walking away from everything they feared. By the time Jesus was done talking to them they had turned around and were heading back for Jerusalem.

The resurrection of Jesus brings a new order to our lives. From the moment Jesus unwrapped those linen clothes from his head and placed them – over there – Jesus was ready to organize your life and mine into something with meaning and purpose.

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## 2. Resurrection: a new day of dependableness.

We are going to raise the screen here for a moment this morning, so we can focus on the picture behind it: the resurrection picture of the angel at the tomb talking to the women.

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- According to the Gospel of Matthew, the angel said to the women, “*Jesus has been raised, as he said.*” [Matthew 28:6]
- According to Mark, the angel said to the women, “*Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*” [Mark 16:7]
- And according to Luke the angel said, “*Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must ... rise again.*” [Luke 24:6-7]

The message of the angel at the empty tomb was this: “You can depend on what Jesus told you.”

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Now, there is always a letdown after Easter Sunday. We get too little sleep, we expend too much energy on being nice to our company, and all the sweets affect our disposition and might make us the opposite of sweet!

There is an after-Easter letdown. So before Monday hits and we start taking out our moodiness on our spouse or children or co-workers, we need to hear how Jesus feels about us. We need to know what we can depend on.

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- You can depend on Jesus to welcome you. Romans 15:7 says, *“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”* Circle the words “welcomed you.”

And there is no condition. It does not say that you need to be handsome, or pretty, or thin, or rich, or smart, or even nice – and then you will be welcomed.

You can be so-so and God is going to welcome you – as long as you are ***being you, and trusting him***. Because God loves you as you are – and God welcomes you as you are. You can depend on that tomorrow, and for all your tomorrows.

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- You can depend that to Jesus you are precious. The Bible says, *“We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”* [Romans 14:7-8]

That is such a precious promise that I have quoted it at every graveside service since I have come to Pontoppidan – and that is a lot of graveside services. *“Whether we live or die – we belong to the Lord.”*

The Bible says, *“For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... you are precious to me.”* [Isaiah 43:3-4] You can depend on that tomorrow, and for all of your tomorrows.

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- And last for today, you can depend on Jesus to enable you. Philippians 4:13 says, *“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”*

Peter Drucker, the business guru, said once that “the purpose of an organization is to enable common people to do uncommon things.”

The purpose of Jesus in your life is to enable you to do uncommon things. What type of uncommon things?

- Maybe Jesus will use you to make a failing child feel like a king.
  - Maybe Jesus will use you to allow a friend who feels abandoned to feel like there is hope.
  - Maybe Jesus will use you to make a defeated colleague see that there are better options.
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I was on my way to the Church early yesterday morning to right one more sermon – I wrote a lot of messages for this week. I stopped at Mc Donald's because I was low on energy and resources.

An older man came in right after me. He was fired up about the day. He was going to a rehabilitation place to help take care of people. "I retired," he said, "then I realized I had to do something of value. I love what I do. It makes a difference."

Easter makes a difference. It is Jesus enabling you to be what God intended you to be. Feel free to stretch again if you would like. Doesn't it feel good to be alive? And doesn't it feel good to know that Jesus is just as alive as you are this day!

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Last thing: A young mom was driving her 3-year-old child to church on Easter morning. As she drove she told her child the Easter story. "This is the day we celebrate Jesus coming back to life."

From the back seat her child asked, "Will Jesus be in church today?"

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**Let us pray:** Thank you, Jesus, for being at the center of our worship. We believe that your resurrection is real. Open us to your living presence this day that we might be strengthened by your power and moved by your compassion. Amen.