

Already Up!
By K Karpen
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Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, NYC

He has been raised, the way he said he would be. Matthew 28

Please sing the Easter story with me:

Early Easter morning, **he's already up**
The day is just dawning, **he's already up**
The women are in mourning, **he's already up**
They're feeling forlorn and **he's already up**

Without any warning, **he's already up**
The earth starts shaking, **he's already up**
The rocks are breaking, **he's already up**
The guards start quaking, **he's already up**

An angel like lightning, **he's already up**
With a look that's really frightening, **he's already up**
He rolls the stone away, **he's already up**
Then he sits there on display, **he's already up**

says You don't have to fear cause **he's already up**
I know why you are here but **he's already up**
You think your Lord is near but **he's already up**
Up north he will appear **he's already up**

I give you this commission
Tell the boys his new position cause
He went through a transition
Despite all opposition,
Though it counters intuition,
It ain't no superstition, **he's already up, he's already up**

I drove up to White Plains, NY two weeks ago for a church meeting. I parked in one of those big parking garages.

When the meeting was over I get back in the car, and I follow the signs to the exit gate. The machine to operate the gate is right by the driver's side window, and I try to read the instructions to see how to get out of the garage.

It says to insert the little ticket that I got on the way in, and when the machine beeps, to slip a credit card in the same slot. This seems complicated, though I figure I can handle it.

But when I try to stick in the ticket, it won't suck it in. I try just sticking the credit card in, but it won't suck that in either.

A glance in my side view mirror tells me there are now several cars behind me, with people who had been at the meeting with me. They are just sitting there quietly while I try to figure out what I have to do to raise the gate and get out of there. Methodists are so patient.

Still, I'm getting embarrassed and frustrated. I'm usually good at this stuff. I try the ticket again, try the credit card.

Finally, I looked out the windshield. The gate was up. It was already up. And I think it had been up for some time.

I guess it was Sunday, and the parking was free. All I'd had to do was drive up to it. Some electric eye did the rest. All I'd had to do was be there. And, look in front of me. It was already up.

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Matthew's account of Easter tells about a dramatic event. There are four different Gospel accounts of that morning, and Matthew's is the only one with Roman guards and an earthquake.

According to Matthew, nearly everything Jesus does is earth-shaking. Everything has seismic implications. His arrival in Jerusalem, his death, his resurrection, all all come with earthquakes, all move the solid rock of the earth.

And Matthew paints a vivid picture of the scene at the tomb. The tomb has been sealed by the Romans, sealed off with yellow tape like some CSI scene. A rock has been rolled over the entrance. Guards are posted outside.

When Mary and Mary come to the tomb, they come just to look. Just to observe. To see his final resting place. To be where his body is.

They come, but they come too late. Jesus is already up.

Matthew tells a vivid tale, with an angel like a flash of lightning rolling away the stone and sitting on it, with petrified Roman guards shaking and falling over like they're dead. It's exciting, it's moving, it's interesting, but you know what? It's all beside the point. Because everything that happens in Matthew's story of the resurrection is an afterthought. It all happens after the fact. Matthew picks up the narrative once the climax is over.

The earthquake doesn't rend open the tomb, it simply shakes things up. The stone-rolling angel doesn't release Jesus from the dead, he simply reveals the truth: The truth is that Jesus is already up.

The guards are shaken solid, so they can no longer guard, but there's no one left to guard.

The women arrive to see a grave that's now empty and a body that's gone.

Because Jesus is already up.

This is really my whole message to you this morning and I'm going to share it with you as simply as I can.

The saving act of resurrection has already taken place.

Jesus has been to the cross. He has already been to that place of human agony and pain and despair and doubt. Jesus has been through what death has to offer. In death he has lived that death of nothingness we all fear.

And, Jesus has been raised from the dead. *Has been raised.* Tells us that it's done, and it wasn't done by him. And it wasn't done for him, either. It was done for you. It was done for me.

The saving act of resurrection is already in place. There is nothing much for us to do. We triggered the electric eye just by driving up. We triggered the gate just by showing up. Resurrection faith is already ours.

And now, what we are invited to do, is to name it, claim it, enjoy it and employ it. Since the gate's already up.

First, we are invited to **name** that resurrection faith.

It's possible to run through life blissfully unaware of what Jesus did on the cross. This despite the crucifixions that go on every day. This despite the small but persistent moments of resurrection that surround us as well.

A resurrection faith is what says that no matter how prevalent the pain, no matter how desperate the time, Christ is already up. He has been raised.

We are invited to name that faith. We can recognize it. We can notice it and acknowledge it.

Some of us were down at Times Square Friday night, getting ready to carry our 11 foot-high wooden cross through the streets of New York. There were a few police barricades there, waiting for the next demonstration, or next New Year's eve, I suppose, and I cleverly propped the cross upright against the barricades. It stayed there for awhile.

There was a man standing nearby, standing very still, holding a nice-looking camera. He was pointing it at the big Times Square jumbotron. I think he was waiting for one image to return so he could document it.

As we watched in horror, the cross began to topple over towards the man and his camera, coming within inches of his head. He never flinched. He never moved. I started to apologize to him but then I realized: he'd never even seen the cross.

I can be like that man. God can practically hit me over the head with the power of the resurrection, and I can miss the whole thing.

We're all like that. We rarely see it. We rarely notice it. We rarely call it by name. But when we do notice and name it, it can change the way we see the world.

Second, since the gate is already up, we can **claim** that resurrection faith. Own up to it. Admit it. Say it's who we are. Resurrection faith is us.

It's a strange thing to claim a resurrection faith.

A resurrection faith says that there's no fear that's not tinged with joy. A resurrection faith claims that there's no evil that God can't turn to good. A resurrection faith claims that there's no death that cannot lead to life.

That's counter-intuitive. That doesn't make sense from the outside. But when we claim it, we don't see it from the outside anymore.

We have an understandable reluctance to claim a resurrection faith. What will people think of us? And what kind of weirdos will that throw us in with?

Last Sunday was Palm Sunday, and we began the service with a blessing of the palms and the donkey. Then we marched around the block with the donkey, singing songs and waving palm branches. Seemed ok from the inside, but we got a few looks.

As we turned the corner and came onto 86th Street, heading back to the church, Jon Deak came up out of the subway, heading for Gristede's and a cup of coffee, I think. He ran right into us. We saw the look on his face as he saw all these weirdos following a donkey, ringing bells and singing songs.

Peter Arndtsen handed him a palm branch, saying, "Hi Jon;" and a flush of understanding came over Jon's face. He said, "Oh, this is *us!*" It's not that we stopped being weirdos; but now we were *his* weirdos.

You may be surprised where you end up, once you claim that resurrection faith.

Third, since the gate's already up, we can **enjoy** a resurrection faith.

Since we've got Presbyterians in the house, I want to admit my secret love for the first article of the Westminster Confession, the short catechism:

"What is the chief aim and end of humanity?"

"To glorify God, and to enjoy God forever."

Who thought that up? That's brilliant.

How much time do we who follow Christ spend just enjoying God? Enjoying God's amazing creative energy manifest in the beauty and power of nature, of music, of art, of dance. If you do nothing else this hour, enjoy God.

Just enjoy God.

And **finally**, since the gate's already up, we can **employ** a resurrection faith. We can make good use of our faith.

What do we do with a resurrection faith? Jesus makes that clear. We start spreading it around. We share it, we witness, we heal, we listen, we care, we work for justice, we insist on peace. Because a resurrection faith refuses to accept that all those things are impossible. No more excuses. Because nothing's gonna stand in the way of a resurrection faith.

On Friday we were making our way through the streets with that big wooden cross, and we'd gotten as far as Rockefeller Center. As we walked through Rockefeller Center we began to be aware that men with walkie talkies were following us. We reached a spot in the center of the Center, stopped, and set up the cross for our prayers.

A guard came up to us, saying, "You can't do that." I said, "It's ok, we do this every year." What I neglected to say, is that every year they tell us we can't do it...

When we were done with our prayers we thanked the guard and started moving again. "Happy Easter," he called to us. I think maybe he had a little bit of that resurrection faith as well.

These things we think are blocking us? We're done worrying about them They are already up. They are gone! It's time for us to stop pretending that they're not. It's time to start moving.

Get up on your feet, **We're already up**
 I'll tell you something sweet, **We're already up**
 Death is in retreat, **We're already up**
 Fear is obsolete, **We're already up**
 Our joy is now complete, **We're already up**
 And so I will repeat, **We're already up**

The stone has rolled away, **We're already up**
 I can see it clear as day, **We're already up**
 The guards are in dismay, **We're already up**
 But we are on our way, **We're already up**

We're done at Calvary, **We're already up**
 There's nothing there for me, **We're already up**
 We'll head to Galilee, **We're already up**
 To see what we will see, **We're already up**

We can name the resurrection
 We claim the resurrection
 We'll enjoy the resurrection
 We'll employ the resurrection

Because on close inspection
 And a little circumspection
 We've found a new direction
 And a new sense of connection
 With the God of resurrection.

In the weirdos of our section
 We see our own reflection,
 Cause God makes the selection
 We'll become a new collection
 We're under God's protection, cause
We're already up We're already up We're already up!