

There was once a very successful businessman. He'd lived the American dream and he was on the speaker circuit to share his expertise with others. He traveled extensively and had a mantle full of awards from organizations he didn't even know much about.

His administrative assistant had been with him for years. He kept his boss organized, took care of booking all of his press and speaking engagements, travel arrangements, on so forth. He knew his boss so well that he made sure that he only spoke at conferences where he'd shine and sell lots of books. This admin had heard his boss speak so many times that he was in charge of writing the speeches. He took his boss's points and polished them up. This admin was one of a kind. A real gem. But the businessman turned professional speaker didn't really appreciate his assistant. He didn't pay him much mind. He didn't say thank you or give him special recognition. He was more interested in being in the limelight.

On a recent trip, he picked up the package his admin left him: Airline, hotel, and rental car confirmations. Copy of his speech. Names of all the speaking engagement contacts. The speaker had done this a thousand times. He read a magazine as he waited for the gate to open. He relaxed on the plane. He schmoozed with folks at the conference.

He got up to his speech and read the words in his manuscript. In just a few moments, he had the audience laughing and completely engaged. He told the folks how he would give them the tools change their lives. In fact, it was as though the heavens would open up and the light would shine down. The audience was waiting with baited breath. The bottom of the page said, "And now, I'll outline exactly how you can change the world in 3 simple steps." He turned the page and saw 5 words printed in bold in the middle of the page, "Now, you're on your own."

(Gulp!) Eek! Can you imagine!?!

The passage today features disciples who watch Jesus ascend and must have been thinking something similar. 'We're on our own now?!?' But the important point about the disciples (and even the speaker in our story, who could have been nicer to his assistant) is that they already have the tools they need to succeed. The businessman got lazy and stopped preparing his speeches. The disciples already have Christ's teachings and his assurance that he's not leaving them alone—that he's giving them the holy spirit—something to be tethered to, something to hang on to.

And, we're no different. Sometimes we feel as though we're on our own, but then we remember. We remember that Jesus is always with us. We remember his life and his lessons and that what we ask for in his name is given. We remember that he said that we'd do what he did—and even more!

So, on this last Sunday of the Easter season, I want to share some Resurrection stories. They're actually even more than that, they're Ascension stories because folks aren't just getting back up after being knocked down, they're getting up and really rising to greater heights than where they started. They're taking a book from Christ's page. Today is called Ascension Sunday and it marks the day that Jesus went back to heaven.

Jesus has already told the disciples (and us, as Christians, by extension), don't worry. I've got you in life. I've got you in afterlife. And I've got you in those times when life as you have known it has ended and you have to start over again.

You've likely had some resurrection moments in your life. First breakup. Divorce. Serious illness. Getting sober. Have your resurrection moments also been ascension moments? Where you've risen to greater heights?

These are stories of patience, endurance, and grace. May they inspire you

Gianessa Wride is a beautiful 10 year old girl who won her schools' 'crazy hair day' competition when she was in first grade. She didn't have purple or pink stripes or frosted hair. She didn't have braids or pigtails or Princess Leia hair. In fact, she didn't have any hair. She'd lost it all in a condition called alopecia causes hair to fall out permanently. But she and her mom decorated her head with stick on jeweled flowers. And she won. She inspired everyone at that school and she's been inspiring folks since.

Years ago, at age 36—in fact, just a few days after her birthday, she had a sudden, massive and debilitating stroke.... She couldn't breathe on her own. She couldn't walk, let alone get dressed or eat on her own. She spent 8 years in rehab. During this experience, her husband walked out and she had to care for her daughter...with no income. She had to avail herself of social service support. As she tells it, "We were evicted. We ended up on food stamps and welfare."

To add to her devastation, her husband left her and her daughter to care for themselves. She explains, "Without money coming in, we could not pay rent or utilities and we were evicted from our home. We ended up on food stamps and welfare." (<https://www.healing-power-of-art.org/casey-shannon/>)

She learned to paint with her non-dominant hand—her left hand. Her art is different than it was before. And it is incredible. Today she is an award-winning artist who paints in the Japanese style *sumi-e* (pronounced sumey-ay), a craft that originated in ancient China. She's shown her work all over the world. She's the Director of The North America Branch the International Calligraphy and Ink Painting Society. According to her website, CaseyShannon.com, she is also the creator, developer and presenter of workshops called 'Artitude' which are art activities healing in nature. Look at the heights she's ascended to!

Leon Fleishman Concert pianist who lost ability to play: Leon Fleischer who made his Carnegie Hall debut at age 16. Began playing with just one hand Teacher (better one b/c instead of just showing how to do he described it), then became a conductor, and eventually made a comeback from the neurological disorder and played again with two hands. Read about him in *My Nine Lives: A Memoir of Many Careers in Music*.

And I am sure that at least one person participating in this service today has had to wear a coat and gloves to be in the winter. At least one person has struggled with grocery money. At least one person has not been able to attend important family events because they didn't have the money for gas. I know this with absolute certainty, because that person was me. 15 years ago, I'd moved back from across the country and I was broke. I could only get part time work and I

was paying cash for my Master's Degree classes. I mention this today because anyone who knows me knows that I've certainly bounced back and even ascended to greater heights. There are people today, with the coronavirus crisis who need help who have never asked for help before. And there should be no shame and no stigma in needing some help. Right now, unemployment is skyrocketing. If you're watching in York Maine, you can call YCSA. If you're watching in York County, you can call YCCAC. If you're watching on the South Shore of MA, you can call ISS. Get the help that you need.

I'm struck that the beginning of the passage, the disciples seek assurance from Jesus. Are you going to right everything that's wrong? Jesus says something we've heard before...essentially that's not for you to know. Your time and God's time may not be the same. (Trust.) It reminds me of when we'd drive from Maine to CT and ask are we there yet? The answer was always "We'll be there when we get there." The job of my father was to drive. He could see what was ahead. From the back seat, all I could see was the back of my parents' heads. My job as a child in the station wagon was to be patient, trusting my parents.

The angels that we meet at the end of the passage are reminiscent of the ones from the tomb who say "why do you look for the dead among the living?" Here, they're saying "Why are you looking there?" Reorient yourselves. Look around. Who can you help? Who can help you? Don't be looking up and away, but looking around, right here. And doing what Jesus asked. When we're aligned with Christ, we're not just living but alive; we don't just survive, but thrive! Blessed be and amen.