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Acts 20:1-12

Outward Church: Freak Accidents

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***Trigger Warning!** The audio version especially, but also potentially the written version of this sermon, may be highly triggering to those who have experienced disabilities and/or seizures.

Today I'm talking about freak accidents. I am going to tell a true story of a sudden death, a tragedy that hit me personally. Our Elders and Deacons recently did a mental health training through [Harbor Christian Counseling](#) in Boston and I asked them how to preach on triggering issues. They said to tell you that I'm going to talk about it. So this is me letting you know this sermon could be triggering for some of you, and it's okay if it would be better for you to go outside and go for a walk in the sunshine. So this is me giving you a heads-up. For those who do stay, I'm hopeful that even though we will look at the tragedy of freak accidents, somehow Christ will redeem them a little bit, and bring hope through the resurrection. So I'm going to pray, and if anyone needs to step out, please feel free to do so, then we'll get started. Let's pray.

Lord, today's sermon is a difficult one. Topics like this one can be really hard to think about and discuss. For those who should leave, would you give them the wisdom and confidence that no one is judging them to step outside. For those who should stay, would you give them the courage to listen, learn, and reflect on what you can do in even terrible situations. Lord, we know that you can and will redeem your broken and hurting world. We look forward to that day. In Jesus' good name, amen.

In the summer of 2011, I traveled back to Colorado and lived in Estes Park my hometown for the summer. I was going to seminary and I had to do an internship, so I ran a college group at the church I grew up at. I don't remember how he heard about it, but one of the guys who attended was a young man named Sam (name changed). He went to a different church and I hadn't spent time with him for years, but he wanted to attend. But that first evening he couldn't find our house. I tried explaining it over the phone to him, but he couldn't get it, so I told him to go to the Post Office and I'd meet him there. When I met Sam, I quickly realized that he had some challenges most of us do not have. He had a spinal issue, so he was always kinda hunched, and he had cognitive issues. He couldn't put things together as quickly or communicate smoothly.

But, he also had one of the most caring and kind hearts I knew. He loved people, and wanted to serve others. Sam wanted to become a volunteer fire fighter. Sam spent that summer faithfully attending our weekly small group Bible study, and he joined us for a hike. He went a little slower than the rest of us, but he had a good time. Here's some pictures of that hike, and Sam. When I returned to seminary, he actually continued the Bible study with others from our group before it pattered out. I saw Sam again a summer or two later. He was working at the local senior assisted living center serving food in the dining hall.

After that summer he messaged me on Facebook. Once he wished me Happy Valentines Day! His neighbor passed away and he messaged me asking what he could say to the widow to comfort her. He told me he was lost for words, but he would give her a hug and try and help her. The last time I heard from him he reached out to me after a big storm to see if we were okay. His last post on Facebook was of a really cute puppy. Sam walked into a local fitness center and while he was relaxing in the hot tub and the Lord took him. He had a freak accident, and he died. Just like that, Jesus took Sam home.

Acts 20:7-9 (ESV)

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. 8 There were many

lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. 9 And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

Freak accident! Death. Paul preached on and on and this young man fell asleep and fell to his death. Sometimes I think we read the very next verse so quickly we don't really let the full impact of Eutychus's death hit us. That day started like any other. That morning, on a Sunday, he probably went to work. The Jews took the Sabbath, Saturdays off, but Sunday would have been spent laboring. The Christians gathered that Sunday evening, "the first day of the week," because that was the day Jesus rose from the grave.

Eutychus is tired and worn and hungry. They gathered to break bread and eat, to take communion, but Paul preaches so long it reaches midnight. And then all of a sudden, Eutychus is gone. Did he even cry out as he fell? Or did he simply slip away? His death is sudden, violent, and tragic.

As I was telling Sam's story, maybe you were thinking of someone you've lost, someone taken from you in an instant. Maybe they had a car wreck or got sick and passed unexpectedly or had a bad allergic reaction. One of my classmates in seminary, Joshua Hicks, died from a restaurant not preparing his food correctly. Freak accident! And when we think back, our hearts shake because there was nothing we could do. It happened so fast. Or maybe you were there and tried to help but it didn't work. Maybe you weren't there, but your imagination keeps their death in your mind. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that death is so terrible.

Did you know that Jesus hates death? Jesus had a Sam, but he went by the name of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. Lazarus became ill, and Mary and Martha sent for Jesus to come and heal him. But Jesus didn't rush to Lazarus's side. He took two days, and by the time he did get there, Lazarus had died. He had been dead for four days. When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she went to see him.

John 11:21-27 (ESV)

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Paul, if you hadn't preached so long, Eutychus wouldn't have died! Did you know Eutychus's name means "lucky" or "fortunate"? Jesus, if you had been there my friend Sam wouldn't have died! Is there a name you're saying? Someone you wish Jesus had rescued? Why wasn't Jesus there for them? But he was!

22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

What is resurrection? Resurrection is when someone who was dead, comes back to life. As Christians, I think we generally think the resurrection matters for two people: 1) Jesus; and 2) our future selves. Jesus rose from the grave, so the resurrection matters for him. He experienced it, and in so doing conquered sin and death. Amen! And the resurrection also matters for our future selves because one day, sometime after we've died, Jesus will return to this world and call forth all who have died from the grave. Some will rise to God's goodness and grace, while others will rise to face God's judgment and wrath, depending on all on their relationship with Christ Jesus (John 5:29). But did you know the resurrection is not just an event? The resurrection is a person, Jesus!

25 Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Jesus not only provides resurrection, he embodies it. Through his veins runs the power of life over death. And anyone who believes in Jesus will never truly taste death. Which would you rather get hit by? A train? Or the train's shadow? The train's shadow! No doubt! I think that's kinda what Jesus is saying here. If you believe in Jesus, you will never truly taste death. The shadow of death will fall on us when we're taken from this life, but the full trainload of death won't run us over because it already ran Christ Jesus over at the cross. Jesus conquered that death train with resurrection and provides each of us with a new state of life. See, to know him is to have a taste of the resurrection already.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

If Jesus Christ embodies the resurrection, and Christ's spirit lives in me, then somehow the power of the resurrection is already present in me. It's not that I'm already resurrected, but that somehow, through the Holy Spirit, we are counted as good as resurrected, and can live in light of that today. That means we don't have to be afraid of death, and I believe we can taste moments of miraculous-supernatural moments of Christ's resurrection power overcoming sin and death and freak accidents and cancer and sickness. It's not only that the train's shadow hits us instead of the train. Sometimes the light of Christ can chase away even the shadow. That's resurrection power my friends! How many people have you known who have received supernatural healing? I used to clean fish tanks. My old boss told me that it was either his mother, or mother-in-law, or grand mother, who had really bad breast cancer, blackened breasts. But God supernaturally healed her. It just went away. Jesus resurrection has ushered in an entirely new reality with new possibilities! How might you live today in light of that? How might you pray differently? Live differently?

But Lazarus is still dead, isn't he? Eutychus is still dead, isn't he? Did you know there's another story in the Old Testament of a widow, her son, and a prophet? This story foreshadows what Paul is about to do. A widow's son dies and the way the prophet Elijah heals him is by laying him on a bed, crying out to the Lord in prayer, and stretching his body over the child three times (1 Kings 17:17-24). That's how God saves the boy and that's very similar to what Paul does, re-enacting Elijah's miracle to show this is the same story. God gave resurrection power in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and I believe he still does it today!

Elijah's miracle leads to the salvation of the woman at Zarephath. She wasn't a Jew, but a gentile, a non-Jew. As we look at Paul's story, he's also not in Jewish territory. He's in Troas, modern-day Turkey on the coast near the Aegean Sea. Eutychus was just like the widow's son. He is a gentile, and Paul is aware enough of what the Holy Spirit is doing that he wants to signal that the resurrection is for all people, just like the widow's son at Zarephath. The resurrection isn't just for the Jews, or just the gentiles, but for any who are willing to repent and trust in Jesus.

Acts 20:9-12 (ESV)

9 And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.
10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him."
11 And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.
12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

Here's what I think Paul recognizes. The resurrection is for anyone who knows Jesus. If Jesus is indeed "the resurrection and the life," then the resurrection is for Eutychus. The resurrection isn't just for Jesus. And, the resurrection isn't just for our future selves. The resurrection can also be for today, if God wills it. Do you believe that you could see God's resurrection power in your lifetime?

I tried to find where I read it, but I didn't write it down at the time. But it has stuck in my head, so I'll share it and maybe the source will turn up one day. I read how in a tribal villages (maybe more) in Asia, when a believer dies, the first thing they do is pray. They don't go immediately into burial plans. Instead, they pray for three hours, asking for Jesus to resurrection the one who has died. So when someone dies, whether by freak accident, sickness, or anything else, the Christians gather in their church and pray for three hours. And when the three hours are over, if their loved one is still dead, they mourn and bury then. But sometimes, God does something amazing, and the one who has died comes back to life.

So my question for you is this. Do you believe the resurrection is for today? Or do you just believe it's for Jesus and for your corpse? Those things are important, but if Jesus is himself the resurrection, and we can know Christ Jesus intimately, can't we also know the power of his resurrection? Can't we see people come back to life, sickness healed supernaturally, and the power of death overcome? As modern-Western logical Christians, we tend to pray that God would heal people through their doctors? Why not pray that God would supernaturally heal in that moment? Maybe we'll save money on our copay!

Here's my challenge to you Cornerstone. Next time someone dies unexpectedly, let's stop and pray and ask for resurrection. But we can't do that! Why not!? Would we ever be so bold as to pray for resurrection, for miracles? When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples he said:

Matthew 10:8 (ESV)

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

Maybe this promise of raising the dead only applied to the twelve, but elsewhere Jesus said this.

John 14:12-14 (ESV)

12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Jesus never calls us to ask for less. He calls us to ask for more of him, more of his power, more of his strength, more miracles. The Lord God wants to manifest his resurrection power in Jesus today. Remember what the villagers pray? It works. People come back to life. Why don't we see Christ's resurrection power in the West? I think it's because we don't ask. So if I or someone we love get hit by a bus, you can mourn and grieve, but why not take three hours and pray for resurrection? Why not exercise resurrection hope?

John 11:38-43 (ESV)

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

Do you know what happened? Jesus, the resurrection and the life, called Lazarus forth!

John 11:44 (ESV)

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Jesus called Lazarus back to life, and if you trust in him, one day he'll call you back from the grave too. Jesus has this master plan to undo death, to reverse its power, to bring life from the grave. When we trust in Jesus, and his resurrection power, the Holy Spirit fills us with resurrection hope. We have hope whether Jesus answers yes, and brings those who have died back to life, or we have hope in that one-day future promise of resurrection life. My friend Sam didn't come back to life, and honestly, I didn't pray for a present resurrection. Instead, I looked to the future. After Sam's death, I posted on Facebook the following words:

“Sam, my heart is so sad to hear you're taken so soon. But I rejoice with you my brother in Christ because one day not long from now we will talk, laugh, and climb mountains like we never could in this life. I'll see you in the far country my friend.”

Several of you from my Cornerstone family posted kind words. Thank you. I wrote those words back in 2017 and I still believe them. I will see Sam again because he knows Jesus, and we will enjoy a friendship even better than the one we had in this lifetime, all, because of Christ and the resurrection.

Maybe you're thinking of someone you've lost, someone dear to you, someone who God took in an instant with no explanation. I'm so sorry. But here's the hope I do have. For those who believe in Christ, there is an “undo button” on freak accidents. Maybe you have dreams where you wish it could be undone. Well, one day, the resurrection will “undo” the freak accidents of all God's people. Jesus will turn to Sam and cry with a loud voice, “Sam, come out!” Not only will he be fully alive, his spine will be healed and his mind will be clear. He will be able to make it to my house just fine! And if you trust in Jesus, no matter what happens, and if those you love him, no matter what happens, you'll hear your name and their names too. Freak accidents undone!

I love what Paul does right after bringing Eutychus back to life. Verse 11 says, “And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.” They eat a meal! They take communion, they remember the fellowship they have in Jesus Christ. That's what I want us to do today as we close the service, take communion. Why, because communion is all about the death of Jesus Christ, and thus also his resurrection. The bread and juice remind us not only that he broke his body and shed his blood for us, but that one day our broken bodies and shed blood will return to life, and that sometimes we can catch a glimpse of that today.

As we take the bread and the juice, I want you to remember your loved ones, family members, friends, and acquaintances who died too soon, and have gone to be with Jesus. God is going to undo their deaths, any who trust in him, and one day soon you'll break bread together with them. Thanks for not falling asleep. Let's pray.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen on [Apple Podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What do you find surprising about the story of Eutychus?
2. What is the resurrection and why does it matter?
3. Who do you hope to see Jesus resurrect?
4. Who do you know that needs to hear about our resurrection hope?