



Luke 24:1-12  
Pop Spirituality  
“Given to Fly”

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This morning we begin a 5-week series that will help us find spiritual encouragement in unlikely places. The series will focus on Scripture as always, but we’ll also look at songs from popular music of the last several decades that have messages aligning with Scripture. You may recall that a little over a year ago, we went through a series titled, “What Might Jesus Say To...” and then we filled in the blank each week with a well-known person or group – Bill Gates, The Beatles, Taylor Swift, and so forth.

Well, this new series is more like, “What might Jesus Say *Through...*” and then end it with: The Rolling Stones, The Eagles, The Steve Miller Band, The Who...and today we start with a song from the beloved Seattle rock band, Pearl Jam. For you country music fans: I’m sorry...but not really. 😂 And you really shouldn’t be surprised, right? These are all bands that have been part of my musical experience over the decades, and have impacted and shaped me. I promise, this *will* be an Easter message, because I realize at this point you might be wondering what you’ve gotten yourself into here today.

So, on the surface, this series might cause you to wonder, “What does this have to do with my faith?” And the answer is: everything. **Our vision here at Rose Hill is “leading people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play.”** And that starts with us and our *own* discipleship. We need to be led toward Jesus in those places as well, because we live in the real world. And while there’s a lot in the world that is challenging to our faith and isn’t redeemable for faith encouragement: there is also much that *is* redeemable and can encourage us. Like *some* secular music songs – or movies or tv shows, dance, poetry, paintings, and so forth. And they can open doors to conversation with others about spiritual matters. Not all of them, for sure; but certainly, some of them. So, let’s start with **Luke 24:1-12**. This is God’s word to you and me on this Easter morning, the event on which our faith hinges...

We’ll come back to resurrection of Jesus in a few minutes. Let’s start with some Pearl Jam history. They formed in 1990, here in Seattle. Over the last

35 years they have released 12 full-length studio albums, and sold at least 85 million albums worldwide. Their first album, *Ten*, was released on August 27, 1991, and has sold nearly 16 million copies. 6 ½ years after later, on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1998: they released their 5<sup>th</sup> studio album, called “**Yield.**”

I still remember getting my copy the day it came out. Gwen and I had married 5 months earlier. Then, 2 ½ months after that we moved to Seoul, South Korea to teach English as a second language. So, we were newly married, in a foreign country, had just left our families here in the Seattle area a few days prior to Christmas, we didn’t know the language or the culture...other than some clothes, we left all our belongings here, including CD’s...and remember: this was before Spotify and Amazon music...we left our chocolate Labrador...everything! So, it was an adventure, but challenging, too. And when “Yield” hit my ears a few weeks after we got there, it was like a bit of home there with me, 11 time zones from home. 27 years later, I still have that CD and all its packaging, with Korean printing on it that I still can’t read.

I’ve always found it to be an encouraging album, by-and-large. **But one song stands out, especially in regards to the Christian faith. The song is called “Given to Fly.”** I love this song. Eddie Vedder, the lead singer and lyric writer for that song (as he is for the vast majority of their songs), is not a Christian as far as is publicly known. But you could probably do a 10-week series on the Gospel According to Pearl Jam, because there’s so much that jives with our faith. A lot of Biblical themes: sin, salvation, forgiveness, and so forth.

But, as far as I know, his intent with this song is not to convey Christian beliefs or theology or an analogy of the life of Jesus Christ. But God works in mysterious, unexpected ways all the time. Amen? We can start with Jesus’ resurrection: No one saw *that* coming! The women sure didn’t: they went to the tomb to care for the body, as was their custom. Additionally: **If God can use the cross, which was the Roman government’s choice instrument of capital punishment...if God can use *that* to *heal* us spiritually, and bring us into relationship with our Creator, then certainly God can use a much less insidious item like a secular song to touch us spiritually, as well.**

So, let me read the lyrics, slowing down in the second half of the song to draw some Biblical connections. In poetic language, the first half tells of a guy who's struggling some in life, can't get where he wants to go, so he heads in a new direction and ends up having some kind of transformative experience: *He could've tuned in, tuned in, But he tuned out; A bad time, nothing could save him; Alone in a corridor, waiting, locked out; He got up outta there, ran for hundreds of miles; He made it to the ocean, had a smoke in a tree, The wind rose up, set him down on his knee; A wave came crashing like a fist to the jaw; Delivered him wings, 'Hey, look at me now; Arms wide open with the sea as his floor...Oh, power, oh...He's.. flying.....whole.*

Then, we get to this in the second half of the song: *"He floated back down 'cause he wanted to share, His key to the locks on the chains that he saw everywhere."* Now, Jesus didn't "float back down," but he did step out of eternity into flesh (it's what we celebrate at Christmas, and actually where our first song this morning started, too). And he *is* the key to the lock on the chains that bind us. Romans 8:2 says, **"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).** In John 8:36, Jesus himself says (of himself), "Who the Son sets free is free indeed." At Jesus' final Passover meal, he took the bread and the cup of wine, symbols of freedom for the Israelites when they escaped from the chains of slavery in Egypt, and Jesus takes these 1600-year old symbols of freedom, and says something that no one had ever said before: that the bread and the wine now symbolize him – his body broken and his blood poured out. In other words: he's the one who gives us freedom. He is the key to the locks on the chains of sin, that are everywhere.

Continuing on: *But first he was stripped, and then he was stabbed; By faceless men, well...* That line continues, actually, but before we get there: Outside of the Apostles' Creed, this is as concise a synopsis of the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' death as you're going to find, even if it is not actually intended as such. **John 19:23, "When the soldiers crucified him, they took his clothes." John 19:34, "...one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear..."** None of the guards are named (we could call them "faceless"), they

take his clothes, they crucify him, they drive a spear through his side. That's a pretty easy connection to Scripture, if you ask me.

Then comes the kicker at the end of that last line: ***But first he was stripped and then he was stabbed; By faceless men, well: he still stands.*** He still stands! This was the message at the empty tomb for the women who went there expecting to provide post-death care for the body: **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5b-6a).** “He has risen!” This is why the gospel message didn't fade to black. This is why there is such a thing as Christianity and the global Church. This is why we exist as a church here at Rose Hill. This is why we're here today. Well, maybe you're just here because you heard Pearl Jam was being discussed, or you've got young kids and they want an egg hunt! 😊 But an egg hunt isn't on the docket if Jesus isn't resurrected! We're not talking about “Given to Fly” and its connections to Jesus if the first disciples didn't proclaim with all their might that Jesus was crucified for our sins, and resurrected from the dead to give us the hope of eternity.

The Bible tells us that in the first days after his death, the followers of Jesus hid and huddled up. Their dreams of what they thought the Messiah was about were shattered and because of their association with him they almost certainly feared for their own lives (that's why Peter denied knowing Jesus even as Jesus was in his so-called trial). And yet, they come out from hiding once the women come to them (women are the first ones to preach the resurrection!) with this news of Jesus being alive. They go and check the tomb themselves (Peter here in Luke; Peter and another disciple in John's account), and then proclaim boldly all the way to their own graves, that Jesus had been resurrected...that *he still stands*. He is risen! They believed this to the point of losing their own lives over this message. People won't die for news they know is false; if the resurrection were fake news, someone would've fessed up.

Back to the song. It finishes with this: ***And he still gives his love, he just gives it away; The love he receives is the love that is saved; And sometimes is seen a strange spot in the sky; A human being that was given to fly...High.. flying; Oh, oh; High...flying; Oh, oh; He's flying; Oh, oh...***

The part about “a strange spot in the sky, a human being that was given to fly” sounds like Jesus’ ascension: his return to eternity with his heavenly father 40 days after his resurrection. But the lines about still giving away his love and “the love he receives is the love that is saved” are parallel to the unmerited, unearned grace of God, that he loves us. Jesus freely gave his life away, the ultimate act of love. And then those who love him back...those whose love is “received” ...who place their faith in him and trust him and seek to live as Jesus did: those people are saved.

Scripture tells us this over and over: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (Jesus, John 3:16).** Ephesians 2:8-9: **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God...” (Ephesians 2:8-9).** It’s not something you can purchase or earn. 85 million album sales, successfully running your own business, college degrees, obeying “yield” signs when other traffic has the right of way...actually stopping at STOP signs...those are all great things to do...but they aren’t what leads to being saved. The gift of eternal life is just that: it’s a gift. It’s something God has graciously done through Jesus.

Now, our first source of encouragement as disciples of Jesus is Scripture. I don’t want you thinking today that a song like this is above Scripture. It’s not. The Bible is our first source of encouragement in faith. And then second is the encouragement of other believers, which we call the Church. So, we need God’s word and we need God’s people in our lives to stay on the path of faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian put into solitary confinement by the Nazis, executed just days before the end of WW2, once said, **“There’s no such thing as a solitary Christian” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).** He knew that we need each other.

But we also don’t live in a Christian bubble. We don’t gather here on other days of the week and just hang out. We live our lives out in the real world. In fact, Jesus *sends* us out into the world where we are to exhibit the Kingdom of God. And in that real world are non-Christian songs (and other stuff of course), but even a song like this can encourage us in our faith. So, I want to play a video of the song for you, a recording from a rehearsal session.

Normally, there's one bad word in this song but this performance of the song is clean. Here is "Given to Fly", with the lyrics added into this video, thanks to my daughter Brooke's friends, Charlotte and Lily Moskowitz.<sup>1</sup> (See footnote if reading online.)

So, you can hear how musically, it's got this soaring, uplifting feel to it that adds to the hopeful message of being saved by an unnamed person because of and through love. That person actually has a name, and his name is Jesus: **That saving work through the means of love is exactly what Jesus does, from his birth to his life to his death and his resurrection that we celebrate today.** Jesus is the key that unlocks the chains of sin that hold us down and separates us from God. He still gives his love away, because he still stands...he was given to fly...He is risen! It's an incredible message of hope and freedom and eternal life, rooted not in a song, but rooted in the historical and real person of Jesus Christ from his birth to his death to his resurrection. And that saving love and assurance of eternity are yours when you say "yes" to him and love him back.

**If you have not said "yes" to Jesus, there's no time like the present.** His love that saves is still being given away, and he offers it to you. You can love him back so he receives your love and you would be saved. What a day, on Easter Sunday of 2025, to say "yes" to this freeing and saving love that Jesus offers.

For those of you who have already said "yes," let's keep following Jesus closely, keep loving him, and keep loving others as well. Keep living like Jesus everywhere you are – with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We're not perfect, but we want these to be the marks of our living. Keep reading his word, keep being encouraged by the church and encouraging others in the church.

But maybe God will surprise you with a word of encouragement in your faith through a song like this, just as those women who went to the tomb were surprised to learn that: He still stands!

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<sup>1</sup> The video, due to copyright laws, is not available publicly online. The video without the lyric subtitles added in, however, is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SHHwmcAWZE>

**Pastor: He is risen!**

**Congregation: He is risen indeed!**

Let's pray...Amen.