

On The Road Again - Easter
Luke 24:13-35
Don Lincoln

Don plays opening measures of "TAPS" on bugle

How many of you have every heard TAPS at some point in your life? At Scout camp?
How many of you have heard TAPS played in a cemetery?

Yes – most of us have heard those somber notes linger over the hills as we have laid to rest the remains of a family member, friend, or one of our nation’s servants.

Listen to a story. After suffering a stroke during his second term in office raised health concerns, Winston Churchill began planning **every detail** of his funeral at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. And for the next **12 years**, Churchill and a handful of government officials worked clandestinely with cathedral staff, under the code name “**Operation-Hope-Not.**” Leave it to Churchill to inject a little humor into what he knew was inevitable.

The plan – 12 years long – had to be amended as time passed. As Lord Mountbatten said, “Churchill kept living, and pallbearers named in the plan kept dying.” The final plan was over 400 pages long. But one aspect of Churchill’s funeral seemed truly inspired. The day of the service, from the west end of the cathedral, a bugler played **The Last Post**, the British equivalent of Taps.

When the somber notes of that solo bugle echoed through the cathedral, you can imagine the lump in the throat of those attending, as they felt the weight of that death, some unable to hold back tears at the bugle’s mournful call.

Then a full minute of silence passed.

But then, in surprise to those mourners crowded into St. Paul’s that day, a bugler in the east played THIS:

Trumpeter Casey plays "Reveille."

Reveille is the morning wake-up bugle call that urges soldiers and scouts to “get up and go” – to start the new day. I’m guessing among the tears more than a few chuckles were heard in the Cathedral.

But the power of the message was unmistakable. It was a boisterous testimony to the shock, surprise, hope and joy of the Resurrection. A wake-up call to the promise revealed in an empty tomb and a risen Lord. The last trump will sound a reveille and we shall all be raised.

But also for those gathered that day, it was as if Churchill – even from the grave – bid them to get up, to press on, to be on the road again, to attend to the day at hand, and live fully into the life ahead, until their own last call.

In our text, surely Cleopas and his friend were in a “TAPS” mood on the road to Emmaus. They were sad. The weight of the loss – the disappointment – the death – consuming their spirits, overwhelming their hearts. The somber notes of Jesus’ last cry on the cross still ringing in their ears.

You and I know what sadness feels like. You and I have been there at the grave; so lost in despair we cannot sense the possibility of anything different. **This is my dad’s bugle.** He played it at scout camp and gave it to me so I could as well. It was played at his grave. I still hear the sound. I still miss him. You and I know that sadness.

But sad disciples, frightened disciples, doubting disciples, grieving disciples, plodding-one-foot-in-front-of-the-other-on-the-road disciples, and a handful of going to anoint-a-dead-body disciples, all get a wake-up call.

For Mary outside the tomb – it’s from a man she thought was the gardener – until she hears Jesus call her by name. For Cleopas and his friend, blinded on the road, it’s when Jesus breaks the bread at table. For Thomas in the upper room, it’s when Jesus shows him the scars on his side and his hands.

Each and every one of them – drowning in the somber sound of **TAPS** – confused, disoriented, grieving, unable to imagine anything different – each and every one of them gets a wakeup call. The sound of **TAPS** is drowned out by the joyful, energized sound of Reveille – sounding the notes of good news: “Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed.”

Friends – this is the simple good news of Easter. **TAPS doesn’t get the last word.** Reveille does. Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing.

A wake-up call came on that Easter day, and you and I know about it today because Mary and Cleopas and Thomas and Peter and all the rest did one thing – they got up, they pressed on, they got on the road and told others about it.

And so dear friends – **that is our job and our joy** – to tell all those whose hearts are broken by the somber sound of TAPS – that the Lord’s wake-up call has sounded, **sin is conquered, there is victory over the grave, and death has indeed lost its sting!**

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed.
Amen.