

“Rolling Away the Stone”

Easter Sunday – Living the Resurrection part 1

Mark 16:1-20

[1] Happy Easter! I am so glad you are here this morning to celebrate the Resurrection. If you are here for the first time or are a guest from out of town, we especially want to welcome you. At Grace United Methodist Church, we believe in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our purpose is to invite everyone to a personal relationship with Jesus to the glory of God. That is a pretty amazing purpose, and it should be, because we believe in a pretty amazing savior, the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Would you please join me in prayer? Holy Son of the Living God, Jesus Christ, we celebrate your Resurrection in a special way today. We rejoice that you died to save us and rose again, proving you are the Messiah. Thank you that you never leave us nor forsake us. Please guide us in this moment now. Open our ears, open our minds, and change our hearts, for long to worship you. Amen.

[2] Have you ever tried to move something impossibly heavy? I want to tell you about the biggest snowball I have ever rolled. I was at a winter retreat with a bunch of my college friends and the weather was perfect for packing snow – low thirties, a good couple of feet of fresh snow on the ground – so we decided to go hiking up Spirit Mountain. At the top of this steep, 400-foot climb, one of us had the great idea of rolling a snowball back down the hill, like you see in cartoons. A dozen ambitious 18-to-20 year old guys starting rolling this snowball until it weighed a ton. I’m just glad it didn’t squash anyone! After several stops and starts down the hill, the snowball finally rolled into a large tree, where it stuck. No matter how hard we strained, we could not move it another inch.

[3] You have probably moved some heavy objects before – furniture, cars, even boulders. And I’m guessing you had help, maybe some heavy machinery, or ropes and pulleys. On the first Easter morning, Mary, Mary, and Salome had none of that. While on the way to Jesus’ tomb, these three women realized an impossible task confronted them: they needed someone to roll a huge stone out of the way so they could tend to Jesus’ body.

Clearly these women loved Jesus very much. They had stood near the cross as Jesus died. They had seen Joseph of Arimathea gather Jesus’ body and lay it in the tomb. They had watched as the stone was set in place – a 2-ton boulder which was rolled to the lowest point in front of the tomb entrance. While easy to install, removing it would have been next to impossible. The whole point was to keep animals and grave robbers out.

[4] The women were on their way to do the final preparation of Jesus’ body. That might be hard for us to understand in our modern era of undertakers and morticians. Today we pay others to do what families did for centuries – prepare their loved ones for their final resting place. When Jesus died on Friday afternoon, just before sunset and the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath – there was almost no time to do the proper rites, since no work was allowed on Sabbath. The women had to wait until first light on Sunday to go to Jesus’ tomb.

In truth, the stone was really the least of these women’s problems. The worst part was how hopeless it all seemed. Jesus was dead. His tomb was blocked by a boulder and guarded by soldiers. The women realized the rock wasn’t going to move itself. They began to ask each other, “Who will remove the stone for us?” In my own paraphrase, they asked each other, “What in the world are we doing?”

Have you ever faced an impossible situation? Have you ever had a problem so unbearable, a burden so heavy, that you found yourself asking, “What am I even doing?”

[5] The stone doesn't have to be a huge, heavy boulder. Sometimes, it is the culmination of little things that gradually overwhelms us and leaves us desperate. Let me give you an illustration. My family and I love beaches. We once went out to Lake Michigan, where we found millions of beautiful stones perfect for skipping over the water. Now imagine someone had told us, we couldn't go home until the beach was cleaned up. Let me tell you, we threw stones until our arms ached, and yet, when we left, you couldn't even tell that we had picked up any stones. It was not humanly possible for us to clean up all the stones on the beach.

[6] Think of all the things that weigh you down. Fights. Grief. Gossip. Trouble at work. Finances. Dysfunctional families. Guilt. Regret. Health issues. These things cause us stress and anxiety, and no matter how hard we try, we cannot remove them by ourselves. The Bible has a simple word for these things: sin. Sin is too heavy to move, too impossible to fix on our own. We all have these stones weighing us down.

[7] Mary, Mary, and Salome were also under a heavy burden. The death of Jesus had clearly shaken them. But the story goes on. When they arrived at the tomb, the women looked up – Notice the double meaning. They literally saw something amazing, and they directed their gaze to a higher power. What had happened? God had rolled the stone away. And what's more, Jesus had been raised back to life.

Frankly, this is impossible. Jesus had been beaten, whipped, speared and crucified. Multiple eye witnesses observed his death. There was no doubt in anyone’s mind, especially among his followers, that Jesus died.

[8] I have officiated dozens of funerals, and I can tell you, I have never witnessed a resurrection. We may have great medical knowledge these days, but let’s face it. It is not humanly possible for us to come back to life. Not by our own power. But Matthew 19:26 says, with God anything is possible. That includes resurrection.

[9] The gospels tell us, the stone rolled away, and a witness told the women why. A young man in white – an angel – confirmed the good news to the women. “I know who you are looking for: Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here. He is risen. He is alive. Look, his tomb is empty. Now, go tell the others. Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, the first place they met. He will see them again.” (See Mark 16:6-7)

The women heard these words and were astonished. They were bewildered. In fact, Mark 16:8 says that the women at first did not say anything to anyone. They had never experienced anything like this before. It probably took them some time to process it.

[10] We know the women eventually did say something to the disciples. Today we know the whole story. The stone was rolled away. The impossible did happen. Jesus is alive. And he did appear to his disciples and many others.

[11] Friends, I believe in the impossible. I believe God still rolls the stones away for us today. The gospel is a paradox: it is impossible, and it is assuredly true. God created us for a loving relationship, but we broke that relationship with our sin. [12] Romans 3:23 says that no one is righteous before God. We have all

messed up. In our selfishness, we have denied God's proper place at the center of our lives. [13] Romans 6:23 tells us our sin causes death, spiritually and physically. We all need help. We all need forgiveness. We all need grace. We all need resurrection. We cannot remove the burden of sin ourselves.

So God gives us hope. [14] Romans 5:8 says that God proves his love for us this way: while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. This is the grace God gives us. Through Jesus, our sin is forgiven, our stones are rolled away, and our lives are restored.

There is a simple way to receive the grace you need. Believe. [15] Romans 10:9 tells us if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we are saved. That's it. We can't buy salvation. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. The righteousness of Jesus is ours if we simply believe. What a gift!

[16] Has the resurrection changed your life? It has changed mine. I am utterly convinced that this story is true. Jesus really did rise from the dead. His resurrection changed the lives of his disciples, who in turn changed the world.

[17] Friends, I have had my share of stones: Depression. Lack of purpose. I have gossiped, made mistakes, and been overwhelmed with guilt. Like a bag that I filled with stones, my sin was a burden so heavy I could not move. I could not overcome sin on my own. So I decided to completely turn my life over to Jesus and let him roll my stones away. It was not easy, but it was definitely worth it.

[18] Jesus loves you enough to die for you, and he rose again to prove he was God. You don't have to be some super-religious person to turn your life over to him. All you have to do is believe. Believe that the resurrection makes a difference. Believe that your life is worth something. Believe that the stones in

your life can be overcome by the power of God Almighty. Trust Jesus to redeem you from sin and death and give you eternal life.

[19] For many people, the gospel sounds too good to be true. We may act like the women, confused, bewildered, amazed, and stunned into silence. The resurrection leaves us all with a choice. If Jesus died to redeem our lives, what will we do next? If it's true that he rose again and lives forever, what does that mean for us?

[20] Let Jesus remove the stone of sin in your life. Let him into your heart. Live for him. And most importantly, share the good news with someone else who still struggles under heavy burdens.

The stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen. It is wonderfully impossible, the craziest story ever told. And it is completely true.

Would you pray with me?

Memory verse

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."

Reflection Questions

1. What is the most impossible situation you have ever faced?
2. What types of stones or burdens do you carry?
3. When has someone rescued you? How did that feel?
4. What do Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean to you personally?
5. How will you respond to the gift of grace that God has given you?

*The ABC's of the Gospel: **A**dmit you are a sinner; **B**elieve Jesus died and rose again; **C**ommit to live in gratitude for how God has forgiven you.*

Song – How He Loves (Eric and Katja)

Easter Confession (Eric and Karen)

Christ, we come to the empty tomb,
we see our own death,
we see our own tomb, we see our own emptiness.
And we remember how we have treated other people—
members of our family, friends and neighbors.

**Lord, we come to your tomb,
we see a hungry world before us,
the pain of starving children,
the guilt of war on our hands,
and we know that collectively we share in those injustices.**

Lord, we come to the empty tomb,
we search within ourselves and we cannot escape what we are,
people caught up in the pain of our own wrongdoing,
for some a deep sense of loneliness
and a frustration of what we would be but are not.

**Lord, when we come to the empty tomb,
we lay before you our pain,
our emptiness and look to you for hope.**

People of God,
why do you seek the living among the dead in an empty tomb?
Are you afraid, are you uncertain, and are you uncomfortable here?

**Our wounds are deep,
we have turned away from that man,
we have broken with him
and seek his fellowship.**

PARDON

Do not dwell on your wounds any longer
for he has risen to heal you,
he has risen to forgive you;
he has risen to change us all and bind us together now.
Christ has risen to forgive us.

Christ has risen to forgive us! Thanks be to God.

— excerpted from *Service of Holy Communion 2010*, posted on the *River of Life* website. Reposted:
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/easter-confession.html>

Holy Communion (no Great Thanksgiving)

Prayers of the People: Easter

Sing aloud, O mothers and sons!

Fathers and daughters, sisters and brothers,
rejoice and exult with all your hearts!

Let us offer our prayers and thanksgivings with one voice,
calling out the good news —

The tomb stands empty!

We look for our Savior among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and in our midst today.

We pray for all faithful people —

for every human soul that turns to God in longing and in love.

Today and every day, pull us out of our graves and into your life.

The tomb stands empty.

We look for our Redeemer among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and among us today.

We pray for the nations of the earth —

for those in authority, and for those under authority.

Come from the four winds, O Breath of Life,
and we shall live together in peace.

The tomb stands empty.

We look for our Mediator among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and within us today.

We pray for this world, our garden home —

for the rain and the snow, the seed and the sprout —

for the birthing room and the last place of rest —

for every new creation.

The tomb stands empty.

We look for our Gardener among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and beside us today.

We pray for those who are sick or suffering —

for anyone who needs extra help just now.

We pray especially for those named here today,
aloud and in our hearts . . .

(pause for names to be said or remembered) Living Lord, renew them in Your love.

The tomb stands empty.

We look for our Sustainer among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and with us today.

We pray for those who have died, and for all who mourn.
We pray especially for those named here today,
aloud and in our hearts . . . *(pause for names)* . . .
Eternal One, bring them home and gather them in.

The tomb stands empty.

We look for our Beloved among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and in the midst of us today.

With joy and exultation,
we give thanks for the triumph of life over death,
offering special thanks for those joys, sorrows,
challenges and delights named here today,
aloud and in our hearts . . . *(pause for thanksgivings)* . . . We are amazed at what
has happened.

The tomb stands empty!

We look for our Creator among the living.

Jesus Christ is alive and in our hearts today.

Holy One, even before we call, you answer;
while we are yet speaking, you hear.

We offer up these prayers in the name of the Risen Christ —
our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend.

Amen.

*~ written by Margaret D. McGee, and posted on In the Courtyard. www.inthecourtyard.com, reposted
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/prayer-for-others-easter.html>*

Closing Hymn – "Up From the Grave He Arose" #322, (Jim plays, Eric sings)

Blessing

May the loving power of God, which raised Jesus to new life, strengthen you in
hope, enrich you with his love, and fill you with joy in the faith.