

LUKE 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

ROLLING STONES

Thank God for Easter! In our culture of 24/7 busyness, a culture where so many options are available to us every hour of every day we at least take some time on this Sunday to celebrate this holiday, this holy day, the holiest of all days...and Easter certainly is the holiest of all days, no disrespect to our Jewish or Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu friends and neighbors, but what we celebrate on Easter is the greatest revelation in human history, it is the greatest revelation imaginable, the revelation that God is not simply an abstract being that invites us to search for him; God has come searching for us in the most down-to-earth way imaginable. He has revealed himself to us in human form, in Jesus who traveled around teaching and healing and showing us all the amazing things about God and his kingdom, and when the world tried to disprove Jesus' divinity and prove Jesus to be merely human by mocking him, beating him, torturing and ending his life once and for all **GOD WOULD NOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN. GOD ROLLED THE STONE AWAY** from Jesus' tomb and brought him out!

And I want to capture that moment for you, the moment that those three women saw the stone rolled away and no one in that tomb, the moment that

Peter found nothing but linens in that tomb. That is the message of Easter, the message that God clearly wanted to communicate to his disciples and to us as we proclaim that message to the next generation – and I’m so so happy that some of that next generation is here, that the message is passed on to them. It’s a very simple message - libraries have been written about what it means, and the whole event has been analyzed extensively, but the gist of the message is an empty tomb; that was the headline news on Easter morning, and we should pause again this morning, and let that very simple message sink in.

Because if we allow it to sink in as we should, as God wants it to sink in, then we will look at life itself in a brand new way. Sure, life can be quite enjoyable: we can live in nice homes in nice neighborhoods with nice friends and nice children with nice toys going to nice schools and live close to our nice parents or grandparents. We can have nice jobs and feel that our life is really fulfilling – we certainly have a lot to fill our lives with. But when God rolled that stone away from Jesus’ tomb, life took on a whole new meaning. Life became more than “nice.” Life became a lot bigger than we had ever imagined. Easter shows us that life is about far more than we can imagine. Easter shows us that we have been thinking too small.

(I borrow this illustration from *The Interpreter’s Bible* exposition on The Gospel of Luke written by Paul Sherer, 1952) There’s a play called *Our Town* written by Thornton Wilder, and in his play a little girl, leaning out from a window on a moonlit night, speaks to a young boy of a strange letter that has come to somebody in a place called Grover’s Corners, a small town that is no more than a crossroad in rural New Hampshire. The letter is addressed Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; The United States of America; The Continent of North America; The Western Hemisphere; The Earth, The Solar System; The Universe; The Mind of God, and the young boy who is listening to this little girl’s message whispers, “What do you know!...What do you know!” I would have spoken only the first and last two letters of that phrase; I would have simply said, “Wow!” Wow! Suddenly we realize that life is not quite so limited in scope. Suddenly we realize that we have been living in a sort of tomb, tightly confined, cold and dark. Suddenly we are aware that life is part of something much bigger! And that stone is rolled away from our self-made tombs and we can burst forth into a new life, a full life because we now know that we belong to something that is infinite and eternal!

And yet there are people who are trapped behind stones that they cannot push away - stones that block out the light and any vision of what might be outside of themselves. The writing on those stones say, "There is nothing beyond this world and this life." And when we believe the writing on those stones we end up looking at our own biology, knowing that one day our hearts will stop beating, our brains will stop functioning, and thinking that that is the end of all things. Those stones can cause us to become melancholy or bitter. We may find some joy in life; certainly we have friends and family in which we find joy, but regardless of whether we're rich or poor, privileged or oppressed, healthy or afflicted, we find that life is not enough. If we are given the short end of the stick we can fall into depression and anger thinking that life just isn't fair and justice can never be attained and we could have accomplished so much more if the cards weren't stacked against us. If we're living the "good life" either as a birthright or by luck or by the merits of our own toil we may still feel that life is not fair as our bodies begin to deteriorate and "the end" draws near, and neither money nor power nor influence can stave off that finality that we believe in. You could say that finality becomes our religion as we are unable to bring ourselves to believe in the eternal. Those stones that cause us so much despair because we can't see beyond ourselves may also keep us from loving others and thus from living that life that God so desires us to live, a life OUTSIDE OF the tomb, a life in full connection with Christ and with our fellow human beings, regardless of their race, religion, gender identity, age, ability, or whatever. Those stones keep us from seeing anything beyond our vacation spots, our closest friends, and our immediate family. Those stones force us to settle for something limited and tragic that we believe to be the most we can ever hope for.

But God has a way of rolling stones, and he started by rolling the stone from Jesus' tomb. And our theology need be nothing more than that declaration: "The stone has been rolled away! Alleluia!" Humanity has become so impressed with itself (and God only knows why) that we now challenge that first Christian declaration, asking for proofs and evidence that this man named Jesus really rose from the dead. "It's scientifically impossible." "There is insufficient evidence to prove it." "It was just a lie to keep this Jesus Movement alive." Let me tell you this: if you are looking for historical or scientific evidence to prove the Resurrection you will never find it. The proof will not be found in any archeological record or ancient relic. But remember that the lack of proof does not disprove anything. The lack of proof just means that faith is necessary.

And the closest thing to proof of Jesus' resurrection will be found in the life of the believer. The proof will be found in a life lived in the faith that we share in Christ's resurrection, that God has so transformed our lives, that he has opened our eyes to a new world and a new life that is totally enveloped in him, a life that is eternal, and that God's love permeates our hearts and now flows freely from us to all people, to all creation. God has rolled the stone away! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!