

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Easter B  
March 31, 2024  
Mark 16.1-8

What About the Stone?

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:1-3 ESV)

In the name of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

That is our joyful shout on this glorious Easter morning and throughout Easter-tide. But that was certainly not the thought of the women as they were heading out to the tomb. They had seen their Lord Jesus die on the cross. They'd seen Him quickly laid in the tomb with a large stone rolled in front of the tomb. Then, there was the Sabbath when no work could be done, no buying or selling either. So the women waited until after sundown on Saturday to buy the aromatic spices they needed to anoint and honor the body of their beloved master.

But after they made this purchase, there must not have been enough daylight left to do the job. So the women had to wait until Sunday morning before they could actually go out to the tomb. Obviously, they wanted to go right away, as soon as possible. Otherwise, it might be too late to do anything worthwhile. After all, they thought, the body had been lying dead there since Friday afternoon.

And so, very early on Sunday morning, right after sunrise, those a friend of mine calls the "Spice Girls" are on their way to the tomb. It's sad though, isn't it, these women going to the tomb? Try to imagine their dismay, their sadness, their grief. They had thought that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One who would bring deliverance to God's people. But now here they are, going out to anoint His dead body.

How ironic! Here it is Easter morning, and they are in mourning! They think Jesus is dead. But then, don't we often do the same thing? And we have the advantage of having been through many Easters. Yet so often we live as though Easter never happened. We act as though Jesus is still shut up in a tomb somewhere, irrelevant to our lives. We live the dull, dreary, as-

good-as-dead existence that the world squeezes us into, instead of the joyous, lively, hope-filled life that Christ opens up for us.

Once when Martin Luther was feeling especially sorry for himself over the problems he faced—I guess we would say he was having a “pity party”—his wife Katie came in wearing a black mourning cloth. Luther was puzzled and asked, “Who died?” Katie said, “The way you have been acting, I thought God had died.”

Well, that was how these women were feeling that morning. Jesus had died, and all their hopes had died with Him. At least, though, they could go ahead and carry out this last act of devotion for their departed master. But in their haste and in their sorrow, the women had not thought everything through. They are well on their way to the tomb when something occurs to them that they hadn’t considered. They ask one other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”

You see, Jesus had been buried in a tomb with a large flat stone covering the entrance. It would be extremely heavy and rolled down a groove, settling in front of the opening. Once in place, such a stone was very hard to move. The women would not be able to move it. But the women are almost there now, and we can hear the discouragement in their voices: “Who will roll away the stone for us?”

Who indeed? And this is a question we all must ask, as we each make our own trip to the grave: “Who will roll away the stone for us?” Unless Jesus returns before, every one of us here today will die someday. For we all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death.

Yes, we all have sinned. We have lived our lives as though God were dead. We make ourselves our own gods. We want to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, rather than listening to God’s Word. We feel little need for the forgiveness of sins, which is the one thing we most desperately need. Church? Oh, church is OK once in a while, I guess—as long as it doesn’t interfere with something I’d rather do. This casual, indifferent attitude toward God and His Word and His Church—this apathy toward the things of God is sin. And it shows how blind and deaf we really are.

Oh, of course, there are also the more obvious, blatant sins—the ones easily identified as sins—or at least they used to be: things like drunkenness, sexual immorality and deviancy, defrauding people. But then there are the subtle, more respectable sins: things like covetousness, bitterness, anger, selfishness, unforgiveness, hurtful talk. These too show how far we are from what God would have us to be. And the judgment on all sins, and all sinners, is death. We’re all going to end up dead.

You and I have earned our place in the tomb. And the stone is a very large one. We do not have the strength to move it. We cannot budge it one inch. All our wishful thinking, all our attempts to escape the reality of death, will not move that stone. The women's question is our question, too: "Who will roll away the stone for us?"

The answer to that question is what Good Friday and Easter are all about. For Jesus Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, died on the cross in our place, to suffer the death we deserve. This Jesus is your Savior! Trust in Him! Forgiveness from God is the gift of Good Friday. And then there's Easter. Easter validates the victory Christ won for us on the cross. Easter shows us the outcome of Good Friday. Sin has been dealt with, decisively, and this is how death has been conquered! And so the question, "Who will roll away the stone for us?" has as its answer: God will roll it away, because of Jesus Christ.

God has rolled the stone away. This is what those women discover, as the tomb now comes into view in the early morning light: "And looking up, they saw that the [large] stone had been rolled back . . . . And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed."

At first the women don't know what to make of this: "What has happened here? Have graverobbers come during the night and stolen the body of our Lord? And who is this young man in white sitting there? Why is his clothing so bright? He must be an angel!" The women, who are already in grief, now are alarmed. They're frightened. So the angel says: "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."

The women's alarm, their shock and surprise, is natural. We are so used to the old ways of thinking that the new realities of God come as a shock. You see, we Christians are people of the dawn. We live on the edge between night-time and the new day. And, in a sense, it's still very early in the day, just after sunrise. Our eyes are still getting used to the light, the light that comes with life in God's kingdom. Sometimes we're not sure which side of the dawn we're living on. And so we become alarmed, confused, frightened.

But, dear Christian, stop being alarmed! Wake up! Wake up to the dawning of a new day! Stop and smell the lilies! Those burial spices the women were bringing are no longer needed. There's a new fragrance in the air. And it smells like life. Life in place of death. The tomb is open, the stone is rolled away, and Jesus is not in there. He's alive and on the move. And Jesus will free you from your tomb, too. There is hope for you today!

Christ has risen from the dead. You don't see him now, but, rest assured, you will see Him one day. You have God's word on it. This sure promise of an endless Easter will carry you through the dark times of life. Wake up and walk in the light of God's love. His peace will calm

your fears. His joy will fill your heart. Of course, it's still early in the morning. Like the women at the tomb, we still may have times when trembling and astonishment grab hold of us, and maybe we're a little afraid. But the tomb is empty, Jesus has risen, and we will see Him, just as He said. Look up, dear friends, and you will see that the stone has already been rolled away.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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