

4/1/2018

“Who Will Roll the Stone Away. . .?”

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Lent/Easter Series: Questions Along the Way

Resurrection Sunday

Theme: God rolls away “the stone” which blocks our way to hope, peace and joy -- even if we do not succeed at that which we intend to accomplish.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQk-8cmdBfw>

Once again, we celebrate the power of God’s love and Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

In Matthew’s account of the resurrection (29:62-66), we are told that Roman soldiers had been sent by Pontius Pilate to seal the tomb where Christ’s body was laid. So, they placed a large stone in front of the opening and stood guard outside, so that the disciples of Jesus could not just take his body and claim that he had been raised, as Jesus foretold.

Mark tells us (16:1-4),

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

So, here now is our question for the day, as we conclude our series of sermons from Mark’s gospel considering Questions Along the Way – from the Mount of Transfiguration to the cross and beyond the grave. **“Who will roll the stone away . . .?”**

Our question today pertains in particular to the tomb of Jesus Christ over two thousand years ago. But, it is a question that has just as much meaning and significance for each of us living today.

† **There are times and situations in each of our lives when we feel as those women who came to anoint the dead body of their beloved Jesus with spices.**

There are times when we ask, “Who will roll the stone away?” Who will roll away the seemingly impenetrable stone, which blocks us from the ones we love, that keeps us from our goal or purpose?

What is it that blocks your path from succeeding at that which you intend to accomplish? What object or circumstance is too difficult for you to move aside by yourself?

During this past season of Lent, we considered things like doubts, pride, divisiveness, materialism, needs and desires (some of which might be good), as well as accountability and

serving Jesus. We reflected on what matters most to us, and the struggles we face in our lives.

Some have been through, or continue to face, disease and illness. We considered the crisis of opioid addiction, overdose, even death of someone we may know and love.

Our stone might be the weight of grief in losing a loved one. Or, we might have to adjust to life without them by learning unfamiliar tasks or doing things alone.

Or, maybe it's trying to adjust to the loss of a job; trying to find a new one, perhaps even learning new skills to do so.

For some, it could be recovering from the breakup of a close relationship or a marriage.

The stone at the entrance of Christ's tomb can represent for each of us who love the Lord, that which it did for the women who came to anoint the dead body of Jesus. It could be anything which seems to separate us from even the hope of being able to see or touch the person or thing which means so much, or that which we intend to do.

† **And then the unexpected happens! We discover that the stone is rolled away. It is no longer an obstacle. Just as the two Marys and others discovered, the stone is rolled away!**

As Mark says (16:5-8):

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

Without telling just how, Mark tells us that the obstacle has been removed. Then ...

*As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. **He has risen! He is not here.** See the place where they laid him.*

Much more wonderful than the stone simply being rolled aside so that they could anoint the dead body of their Savior, the women heard the good news: "He has risen! He is not here."

They were instructed to see for themselves that he was no longer there in the tomb.

And then they were given instruction to go and tell Peter and the others.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

... that is, until they told Peter and the other disciples.

I'm sure we have all heard wonderful stories from others, some even among us, of ways in which God has rolled away the stone placed before them. I believe I've shared one or two myself.

How about you? Have you experienced the stone being rolled away in your own life? If so,

you know what I'm talking about. Go and tell someone else what God has done for you. Go and tell others that you know our Savior, your Savior, is risen – he lives!

Or perhaps there is a stone which still stands before you. The good news is that God can roll that stone away. You may not at first see the risen Christ, but you will see the evidence of the empty tomb. Do not be afraid to enter where God leads you. Have faith! Believe!

It's somewhat interesting to note that Mark's account speaks only of a young man dressed in a white robe, who greeted the women at the tomb and shared with them the good news.

Matthew's account is a bit more dramatic, telling us (28:1-10) that Mary Magdalene and another Mary went to the tomb, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, as an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. . .

Rather than get caught up in the differences of these and other accounts, the essential truth that all the gospel accounts have in common is that **the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty of Christ's body for he had risen. He had risen indeed!**

† That Matthew tells us that the stone was rolled away by an angel of the Lord reveals to us that **sometimes God uses special messengers or agents to fulfill God's loving plan.** Sometimes those angels or messengers are supernatural, as at Christ's birth or at the garden tomb.

And, sometimes they are of the natural kind; not heavenly angels as found in the Bible, but people who are willing to share God's word and love with others here on earth. Metaphorically speaking, we all know of angels in our midst, don't we? They are the persons who lift our spirits by reminding us that God loves and cares for us. They are the ones who help roll the stones away from the tombs which we face.

Susan Farr Fahncke tells her story of "Internet Angels." She says, "My sister was twenty-eight years old and dying. Diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, Angel (her sister's real name) would be gone by the summer, we were told. It was April, and the weather outside matched this time in her life. Stormy, winter nearly over (for us), the promise of spring was on the horizon. It was a time of waiting and anguish, a time of learning to live in peace and coming to terms with the end of life as we had known it.

"Reeling from both physical pain and the pain of her husband simply walking out of her life, my young sister bore loneliness and sorrow of the deepest magnitude. Hard as I tried, I could not erase her sadness. Our days were spent together with me desperately trying to make her smile and forget, if even for a moment, her deep loneliness.

"I run a Web site and send out daily inspirational stories" she writes. The members of my 'online family' are an amazing group of people." She goes on to say that "Many have suffered through a great deal. Through their letters and stories, I have come to love these people. They have survived cancer, divorce, homelessness, the death of a child, a spouse, a parent, a sibling, disabling accidents, heartache and pain of every other kind."

I know that it's likely that each of us here has experienced such circumstances.

Susan goes on to say, **“Somehow, life has a way of creating kindness and compassion in the wake of pain.”**

She found that writing about her sister's illness was cathartic, helping to release the difficult feelings. She shared many of their experiences with her daily web list. Through her stories, her sister Angel became a part of the lives of those gentle and loving people. Gifts and cards began to arrive for her sister. Relationships with people all over the world developed.

As the tumor grew and her sister's ability to communicate, to walk – to live – deteriorated, hundreds of letters and cards, and most of all, prayers, poured forth. And through it all, as her life slowly seeped away, her spirit began to transform. “Being loved can create a miracle,” Susan writes.

Also in the beginning of April, Susan found another web site called www.chemoangles.com. She had no idea that clicking on that link would put her sister's heart back on a path of healing, of love. It opened up a world of kindness that became a rainbow during the last weeks of Angel's life. Daily cards, letters and packages arrived only two days after she signed Angel up for a “Chemo Angel.” She had hundreds of “angels” who reached out with boundless love and compassion. Between the two sources, every day of her life brought surprises of love and friendship. Her sister's loneliness began to subside and was replaced with the thousands of strangers – “angels” (as she calls them) – who unconditionally loved her and gave her back her smile, and gave her a haven of reprieve from her pain.

(From Miracles of Renewal, When Miracles Happen®, Guideposts Books, Carmel, NY)

What had happened to Susan's sister, Angel? The stone covering her empty heart was rolled away.

Now God could have done that directly, but maybe Angel would not have been as receptive. Maybe God chose to use those persons, even strangers to her, to roll away the stone which had covered her empty heart.

I know as well that God has used, and does use, some of you for that very purpose.

My friends, the good news I want to share with you today, if you don't already know it, or if you've just forgotten, is that **God rolls away “the stone” which blocks our way to hope, peace and joy, even if we do not succeed at that which we first intend to accomplish.**

We recall the women who first discovered that the stone, which sealed the tomb of their beloved Jesus, had been rolled away. That was a blessing! But they **had even greater news revealed to them.** **Jesus, who had been crucified and dead, was alive again. He was risen! That gave them something to really live for!**

That gives each of us something to really live for!

Christ is alive! He is risen, indeed!

May the risen Lord be a part of your life, now and forever! Amen.

