

“Who Will Roll The Stone Away From The Entrance of the Tomb?”

Mark 16:3b

April 1, 2018

The Resurrection of Our Lord - Easter Day

And very early on the 1st day of the week, when the sun had risen, the women went to the *tomb*. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

Today is Easter Sunday - a very important and happy day for all Christians in the world. We are here to celebrate and a celebration requires preparation. But we all prepare in different ways. Back in the day, people prepared for Easter by shopping for new clothes and coloring eggs. Some people still do this. Here in church, the youth and are LWML ladies prepared an Easter breakfast. Our choir prepared special music for worship. I prepared special services and sermons. Maybe some of you are preparing a special dinner for family or friends this afternoon. All of us have used a lot of time preparing for this joyous event.

Long ago on that first Easter, some women were also preparing for Easter. But they were not preparing for a joyful celebration. They were sad and depressed. They were preparing for a burial – the interment of their Friend and Teacher, Jesus. They had not had time to do this task on Friday before the sun went down. They could not do this task on Saturday because of the Sabbath rules. Now, on Sunday, they were preparing to complete their sad job: preparing Jesus body for final burial.

At dawn, the women left. They wanted to finish this job quickly. They were all ready except for one thing: the large stone in front of Jesus' tomb. Jesus' tomb had soldiers guarding it because his enemies thought Jesus' disciples would steal the dead body and then claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. The governor put a seal on this tomb to make show sure no one disturbed it. The women were not very strong enough to move the stone. They did not have the authority to break the governor's seal. So they wondered, "Who will move the stone from the front of the tomb?"

This is very important question. If the women arrive at the tomb with the stone in place, it means they cannot finish their work. But, more importantly, if the stone is still in front of the tomb, it means Jesus dead body still lies within. That leads to another important question : if the stone is still firmly in place and Jesus' death body within, how would that change your lives?

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, " For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile (foolish); you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Cor. 15:16-19) If Christ was not raised, His death was means nothing. It does not have God's approval. We are still have our sins, are still separated from God and are still on our way to hell. If Christ was not raised, we waste our time coming to church every Sunday and worshipping a dead Jewish rabbi from two thousand years ago. If Christ was not raised, then we waste our money maintaining an institution and church building here. If Christ was not raised, then all of our dear friends and family members who have died remain dead and gone. If Christ is not raised, then people should pity us for not only wasting our time, but for letting a false Messiah fool us.

However, Paul continues writing, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Jesus is alive. That is a fact. That is not a possibility, not a wish, not a dream, or a speculation. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead! The women traveling to the tomb on that first Easter long ago didn't know that beforehand. They could only worry, "Who will roll the stone away?" But, as they drew near the tomb, they saw that the stone was already moved. They looked inside and saw the grave was empty. Jesus' body was gone. They saw an angel who said, "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 worried, "Who will roll away the stone?" which was a very reasonable question under normal circumstances. But God did it! God raised Jesus from the dead as He promised and opened the tomb so the women could see this amazing reality. Jesus has defeated death! Jesus' sacrifice for sin has been accepted by God the Father! Your faith is not in vain! Those who died in the Lord are alive with Him now! Christ is risen from the dead.

You are here this morning because you know that and want to celebrate that fact once again. That is important to do. Many people have tried to stop this story and say Jesus did not rise. The Jewish priests and elders paid money to the soldiers who guarded the tomb to lie and say that Jesus' disciples had stolen his dead body. Since then, people have made up stories to discredit Jesus' resurrection. Some have said the women went to the wrong tomb, an empty tomb and they did not see an angel, but a gardener who said, "He is not here." Some say Jesus never died, but Jesus passed out on the cross and was revived in the tomb.

Such foolish false stories! However, these stories could not stop the truth. The stone has been moved! The tomb was empty. And the Holy Spirit has led us to know and believe that Jesus rose from the dead! Christ is risen! We no longer are in our sins. God has accepted Jesus' death on the cross as payment for our sins. Christ is alive! We are no longer separated from our God and on the way to hell, but are reconciled to God and have the sure guarantee of everlasting life. Christ is living now! We are no longer alone. He has promised to be with us always. We don't ever have to worry about a thing because we do not subscribe to the teachings of a long dead Rabbi. Rather, we trust a living Lord who will always take care of us in this life and bring us to live with Him in the next life. Our lives have changed from sadness to joy, from darkness of our sin to the brightness of His love. Christ has risen!

Has that great truth affected you this day? How did your Easter Sunday begin? What did you do when you came to church this morning? Were you just trying to get awake? What did you say to each other : "Good morning!"? "Happy Easter"? We can do better than that. Do you know what many people in European countries say on Easter morning? When two people meet each other on Easter morning, one says, "Christ is risen!", and the other person joyfully responds, "He is risen indeed!" Is that important? Does it really matter what we say? I think so. Any person can celebrate Easter. Anybody can make colored eggs. Even a person who does not believe in Jesus can say, "Happy Easter!" That's very easy and those words are like, "Have a nice day!" They really mean nothing.

Remember what we are celebrating! Easter is not for new clothes, the Easter bunny, colored eggs, chocolate candy, Easter lilies, dinner with family. Those are nice, but not the most important things. We celebrate for one important wonderful reason: the stone was moved from the tomb, the tomb was empty, Christ is risen and lives.

That's exciting! Do you realize what it means? Jesus had taken our place and lived a perfect life for us which is credited to our account before God. Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross for our sins. The resurrection proves that God accepted that sacrifice. Jesus showed Himself stronger than our sins, stronger than Satan, and stronger than death itself. No one and nothing is stronger than Jesus. No temptation from Satan, no sin, no problem or suffering, nothing is able to overcome you. If you have done wrong and feel guilty, do not fear - Jesus saves you from that. If you have problems in your life, do not be afraid or depressed - Jesus saves you from that. If you are lonely, don't give up - Jesus is by your side always. And, when you face life's end, have no fear at all. Your life in heaven is guaranteed. And all of this is because that tomb was empty, the stone was moved, and Jesus was alive.

How differently we will live now because of that! Naturally, we celebrate that news on this Easter. But, long ago, the church changed its worship day from Saturday to Sunday so that we could celebrate the news of Jesus resurrection every week. It doesn't matter which day it is, which week, which month we celebrate Jesus resurrection from the dead. Whether it's Advent, Christmas, Lent, - we celebrate Jesus resurrection. We focus our attention on sin forgiven, punishment canceled, death changing from the payment for sin into the gateway to heaven, and new life that continues forever. All of these - Jesus one because he obeyed God's Law perfectly for us and suffered the punishment for our sin by dying on the cross. Jesus resurrection from the dead shows God accepted Jesus obedience for us and God accepted Jesus sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

But we want to do more than celebrate Jesus' resurrection for our little group here. We also want to share this wonderful news with other people so that they may share our joy. We give our time and our money for the Lord, not because we have to, but because we want to respond to His love and help His love reach all people. We volunteered to serve her, not because of the high pay or because everybody honors us for doing so, but because we work toward a goal of bringing Good News to all people deaf and hearing in our community. We don't continue with anger, bitter feelings, and jealousy. We are like a family. Jesus, our older Brother, who was dead and now lives, changes us. We no longer live for ourselves, but we live for Him by living for and serving one another.

Can our words, greetings, and attitude on this day show that? I think they can. I think they should. Let's try that together. When I say, "Christ is risen!", then you answer, "He is risen indeed!." Ok? "Christ is risen!" ["He is risen indeed!."] Believe that wonderful news for you! Live with that wonderful news on Easter and every day! Share that wonderful news with others! "Christ is risen!" ["He is risen indeed!."] Amen.