

For Easter Sunday – April 4<sup>th</sup> 2021

Exodus 15:1-11; 1st Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-18

That stone's just too big. There was a huge boulder that would have been placed in front of the tomb where Jesus lay. That boulder would have been too large for me to move, at least by myself.

So think of the women that were coming to the tomb. They had to be discussing that large heavy disk that was in front of the tomb. It was shaped like a disk, and usually requires several large men to move it. It would have been placed in grooves, and moved from side to side, often up an incline.

The purpose of this boulder was to protect from man and beast. And in Jesus' case – because they had expected the possibility of some kind of funny business, it would have probably been an extra large stone. This is why there were extra precautions taken as well.

It would have been really hard to move it with a Roman guard of 4 men in front of it. There would have been 4 men on guard at all times, out of a cohort of 60. They rotated who had the duty, so whoever was on duty would be very alert.

For them, the consequence of being found lax in their duty was death, so I don't think that the Roman guards would have been willing to leave their post. And, of course, the women might not have been allowed to go in to the tomb, to take care of the body.

So the women were discussing this on the way to the tomb. They knew that they would not have been able to lift the stone. The disciples may have been able, but not with the guard that was there.

And that would have even been more the case, since they were placed there in part to keep these same disciples away.

So the women wondered who could remove the stone. But when they got there, there was no guard. There was also no stone over the tomb.

God had removed the stone. Without that having happened they would not have know what had taken place. They would not have seen that there was no body in the tomb.

It had to be removed – not so Jesus could get out, but so that they could get in. It had to be removed, so that they could see what had happened.

They had been coming to do all the right rituals for the dead. They were probably hoping to get someone to remove it for them. They wanted to say their final good-bye to Jesus.

But that was not the case. They found the tomb empty. There were no guards near the grave anymore. That stone was too large for them to remove, but not for God.

That stone was the easiest of the ones to move for God, and this is the first stone that was moved on that first Easter morning.

The stone of ignorance is too big for me to move. There is a saying that ignorance is bliss, but that isn't true here.

Mary in her ignorance wasn't very bliss filled. Ignorance simply means to not know something. There was a lot that was unknown on that first Easter morning.

Mary was upset – she asked, “Where have they taken my Lord?”

She didn't understand that Christ had risen, and so she wept...for her loss.

She wanted to honor the dead person. But now her sorrow was even deeper. She thought

that when Jesus died, it was the end. But now matters were worse.

The stone of ignorance is too big for me to move.

Later the disciples were said not to understand the scripture. They didn't know YET. They didn't understand YET how Jesus fulfilled the scripture. The stone remained blocking passage to understanding the empty tomb.

Then Christ showed himself.

First to Mary, who wasn't able to see through her tears. Those tears blinded her. She was close to Jesus before, but now through her tears she wasn't able to recognize him.

The man she thought was a gardener took a moment. He had her wipe away the tears. She listened to his voice. She heard his words. It was finally by a word that she recognized him. By his calling her name. And so she responded.

Ignorance is not bliss – and now she knew. He is risen!

To overcome our ignorance, Christ shows himself to us as well

- In the Lord's Supper
- Through His Word
- Through a word addressed to each of us by name – in Baptism. When Jesus said to you...personally...you are joined to my death and resurrection.

He shows himself to us, because we too need to see and hear. The written Word of God – the scriptures now make sense – but only through Him. So that stone is removed, and we can look into the tomb and understand.

The stone of my need to cling to one time and place also needs to be removed.

Each year, in the Holy Land there are services at the grave of Jesus. But did you know that there are actually 3 services – because there are 3 different sights. I know that in last year and this year they are scaled down – but they still went on.

That is significant for us. The grave could not contain him. There was no one place that could contain him. And so, the early church did not make a shrine out of the place that was his grave – we don't know which one is really the grave of Jesus, or if any of them actually are.

Christ is not tied to one time and place.

Mary wanted to grab Jesus. She wanted to hold on to him there, and not let him move.

Love songs often speak of the moment that never ends. But that is not the case of real love, because people change.

Jesus wanted Mary to know the power of the resurrection, and not just cling to a moment.

We, too, are tempted to cling to a moment

- To a church service.
- To a time of prayer.
- To a song.
- To a particular moment when God felt nearest.
- To a duty that was done.

We are tempted to cling to a moment, but that cannot be, and so we are sent.

Mary went to the disciples to announce what had happened. She was the first witness to proclaim the resurrection. One of the old titles for Mary was “The apostle to the apostles.”

That is an interesting word, witness. It is a legal word for one who tells what they know.

And this witness and that of other disciples is now something to live and to die for.

HE IS RISEN! And you are sent. Not for a bunny – or eggs and candy, or the ham I am looking forward to this afternoon, but to tell others HE IS RISEN!

Finally, there is another stone that is too big for me to move: the stone over my own tomb. You will die, unless Christ returns.

Lent began with the words, “you are dust, and to dust you will return. A reminder that we all die.

Jesus died.

You will be placed in a casket. Probably a vault will be placed over that, and it will be sealed. A gravestone will be placed over you. That is a stone that you can't remove. This is the stone that seems the hardest to deal with. If it isn't the hardest, it is the one that you are most aware of.

You will die.

But wait...you have already died.

You died here – in Baptism.

Here where you were joined to the cross.

The gravestone has already been placed.

And that stone is removed. You have been raised with Christ.

The casket...the vault...the dirt will not contain you.

You will be raised when Christ returns. Because you have been raised already with Christ.