

Easter SERMON 2017

When the Stone Cried Out!

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2,000 plus years ago, in the dark of the morning, a large stone, weighing about two tons, was moved away from the front of a garden tomb

It didn't roll away by itself.

It didn't move through the force of people

It was moved by the power of the God of resurrection



Here is a picture of a Jewish tomb at that time, very similar to the tomb we believe Jesus was laid in.

As you can see the two-ton boulder is hemmed in by the tomb wall on one side, and the wall on the outside, so that it doesn't fall over. What you might not be able to see is that the stone also runs in a little trench that slopes downward, the lowest point being at the front opening of the tomb.

So in order to move the stone, you have to push it up that sloping trench to get it out. It is much easier to roll the stone down in front of the tombs opening, than to move it away UP that trench.

But the scene that confronts the women that first Easter morning was exactly that.

The stone is rolled away! Moved over!

Standing away from the tombs entrance, that boulder declares the essence of the gospel message...

That all barriers have been removed between us and God.
That our sins — have been forgiven – rolled away
That death has been conquered.

You couldn't do it. No way! Not on your strength.
No matter how hard you tried...

You couldn't move that big old boulder up that incline...

Just like you couldn't fix that separation between you and God
There was no way that you could have handled that
 Not by being a good person – cause God's requirements are
too high for us to attain
 Not by being super religious – cause religion is so often about
human effort too...RATHER

The Author of Life..God himself...moved that stone *for you*...by giving
his life... FOR YOU
Heavens gates are open wide
Your sins are forgiven
All barriers are gone
You couldn't move that stone, but God did

What you could not accomplish...God accomplished FOR YOU

*Now I am not here this morning to try to prove the historical fact of
the resurrection.*

There is so much objective evidence I cant go through it all...but there is a pamphlet at our welcome center that you can take home with you that tells you why the resurrection has such historical veracity.

If you are here for the first time please know that as Presbyterians we don't check our brains at the door. We are an educated, thoughtful people and we ask the hard questions.

But when you look at the facts there is more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ than you can imagine - more than most historical events that we count as fact.

If you take this seriously, its harder not to believe in the resurrection, than to believe it actually happened... There's y a movie out called The Case For Christ – great movie – 4 stars on Rotten Tomatoes... talks about the same things that are in the pamphlet.

So take the pamphlet, see the movie, and come talk to me if you want to know more. I love talking to people about this pivotal event in human history.

Now back to the two ton stone

I want you to get that there is a certain wry humor to this boulder moving God.

This morning we read John's gospel –

And yes, in that gospel, it said that the stone had been moved....and it's not evident so much in the English

Although some translations allude to it...

But you can interpret what he says in the Greek

As not simply that the stone was moved away to the side of the entrance a little bit – allowing for a small opening

But the text can be interpreted that this boulder was literally picked up, and moved elsewhere

“lifted up” ...so to speak...and placed down in a different place entirely a few feet away

As if to say...you think this boulder is so big?
You think you can guard this tomb and keep a dead Jesus inside with
a rock?
You think that a two-ton stone barrier is going to thwart my plan?
If you think that...you've got another thing coming

Believe me...God wasn't struggling to roll that stone away that first
Easter
God wasn't flexing his muscles huffing and puffing and sweating
trying to move that boulder up the incline...

Rather, God just picked that two ton stone up, and moved it over –
from here to there

The wry humor here– characteristic so often of Jewish humor
Is a humor that laughs at our human efforts
Our rocks, Our Roman seals, Our guards in front of the tomb

Even evil itself that wreaked havoc at the crucifixion - pales in
comparison to the power and goodness of the living God
Its as if God says to Evil – Are you done yet?
Now...watch me work.

Did you know that for the Greek Orthodox Church, the day after
Easter is reserved for everyone to come together, party and tell jokes
with one another. Why?

Because for the Greek Orthodox Church Easter is the biggest joke
against evil, and darkness, and death, and the futility of human effort
to thwart God's plan, that anyone could ever imagine.

That big old stone, barring the entrance to the tomb – rolled in place
by human hands
Was supposed to be a daunting reminder of death's permanence
Solidly locked in at the bottom of that sloping trench

Picture a goalie for the Sharks...they are doing really well right now...
you aren't supposed to get by that goalie... that was what that old
boulder seemed to be all about.
You can't get by death.

That boulder rolled into place by humans said
“Well, that’s that.
No exit from here.
No one gets by me.”

And It did *seem* that way, didn’t it?
Yes, it *seemed* that way for three long days as Jesus lay in that tomb.

Just as certain things in our own lives
can seem insurmountable, inescapable, a dead end for us.
Its easy to give into despair at times in this world when the stones
don’t seem to be moving in our lives

It *seems* in this old world like evil has the final say more often than
not.
But what so often *seems* to be the end, – is not the final word where
God is concerned.

Because the word Despair and Dead End don’t exist in God’s
vocabulary.

Yes it *seemed* like a dead end...when Jesus lay inside that borrowed
tomb
And the stone stood over the opening
And darkness descended, and the cold creeped in

It *seemed* like the boulder meant the end of the story
It looked like that big stone was crying out...this is it. Its over.

But, it only *seemed* that way.

On that first Easter morning, that we celebrate today with thousands
around the world...while it was still dark
Something stirred inside that tomb
And the great joke God was playing on death got started

The very life of the living God who created all things and through
whom all things exist and have their being

That same God, who breathed into Adam at creation and made a living breathing human

Breathed into the battered, wounded and bruised corpse of his beloved son, his wounded son that God had so willingly given to the world he loved

On the third day, lying there, limp and lifeless in the cold murky darkness
Jesus body begins to move and stretch and grow warm again

Despite the massive two ton stone at the entrance,
God comes in...and does a resurrection miracle

And then he moved that two ton stone

God always moves barriers that keep us away from him – its what he does – its his specialty
No matter what the price, no matter what the cost

God will do anything to get to us...There is nothing that can separate us from his love
All we need to do is say “*Come into my heart Lord Jesus*”
And all the boulders, all the barriers, between us and him roll away

As the stone stood there, now in a new place,

With the empty tomb open and accessible
The stone declared a new message

Surprise!

Death is not the end

The story doesn't end here

The Author of Life is stronger than the enemy of death

And *The punch line to the joke God has played on death? “Christ is risen indeed”*

No barrier we erect can ever keep God out
And heaven laughed at Death.

A church in Bangladesh was showing the “Jesus” film to an audience filled with people who had never heard the gospel before.

Little children sat in front and in the aisles.

The adults stood in the back.

As the story of Jesus’ crucifixion unfolded, there were tears and audible gasps.

The horror and pain of Jesus execution was overwhelming.

As the Bengalis watched , one young boy suddenly spoke up, “Do not be afraid. He gets up again! You can laugh ! I saw it before.”

Heaven laughed at death that first Easter morning...and

It was a joy filled “Now we can be together again” kind of a laugh

Have you ever watched families being reunited in the airport greeting area?

Where they hug each other for long periods

And are so glad to be together again

There’s something so right about being together in love...and something so wrong about separation

When Jesus died and rose again on the cross he, made it possible for us to come back into a close intimate relationship with him.

That’s why when Mary saw the resurrected Christ he said to her, “**I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**”

And for us in our lives, in our own struggles and doubts and fears

The life of God always triumphs in the end

If we dare to trust, and we dare to listen – God still moves stones for us all

Relationships, jobs, finances, our spiritual doubts and fears, resentments, illnesses, conflicts

Sometimes we have to wait awhile for that stone to move

Sometimes it seems like God is not there

Sometimes dark things creep into our lives and we feel as if we can barely hold on

But hang on because that big old stone will move for you
Just like it did on that first Easter morning
If you trust in the One who loves to play jokes on death,
and despair and dead ends and hopelessness

Our trials and difficulties are just a drop in the bucket when compared
to the goodness and life giving power of God
Nothing is impossible with him!
We can't move our own stones but he can!

“A dead Christ I must do everything for” said Andrew Murray. “A living Christ does everything for me.”

That's the message of Easter.

Now, let me ask you a question that might be so obvious, and yet
sometimes we can miss the obvious...
I've been talking about the stone being moved this morning
And what that says for us as Christians
But let me ask you to think about this for a moment...

Why did God move that boulder - *really*?
Why did God roll that stone away and put it in a different place?
Was it so that Jesus could come out of the tomb?
No... that wasn't it at all...

If you were listening to the scripture being read this morning, the
second part of that is Jesus coming through a locked door, appearing
to his fearful disciples and saying “Peace Be With You”.

Jesus didn't need a door, an opening to get in and out of places after
he was resurrected.

Peter Marshall, a famous Scottish preacher and chaplain for the US
Senate said years ago:
**God didn't move the stone so that Jesus could come out of the tomb.
God moved the stone so that we could go in.**

This great joke on death that God accomplished
This unprecedented never again repeated occurrence that a dead
man would come to life again
This great gift that God accomplishes FOR US
demand a response

Folks **This is our miracle**...this whole life of Christ the death and
resurrection was done *for us*
And the stone moved by God, leaving the tomb open cries out to
us...**“Enter in! Come and see!”**
“Come in and make this your miracle – you are invited into this event”
“Come in and get involved in this reality cause this is the truth”

Notice, touch, see, recognize, who I am and what I have done for you
The stone was rolled away so you could come in...

The scripture tells us that when the women declare to the disciples
that they have seen Jesus as risen, Peter and John start off toward
the tomb.

They are running
But the first disciple John, outruns Peter and gets to the empty tomb
first

The door to the tomb stands wide open –
And when John arrives first he kneels and peers in but doesn't go all
the way into the tomb right away

He is cautious
careful, thoughtful, and perhaps a little bit afraid, not quite sure what
this was all about.

Some of you may be there today
Just looking in at Easter from the outside...wondering about all this,
carefully assessingbut still keeping a distance from entering the
miracle with all you have got – cause you know if you do fully enter in
it will change everything.

Peter on the other hand, known in scripture for his impulsivity, now arrives, pushes past John, and goes right into the tomb with no hesitation – with all he has got

John, seeing Peter go in, then follows

Looks around

Observes the linens that had wrapped Jesus' body

And then we have these marvelous words

He saw and believed

How are you entering into the miracle of Christ's resurrection today

What is your response?

You may be more cautious like John, careful, observant, assessing what this might mean...asking questions, pondering

Or you may be more like Peter jumping in with both feet. With a YES LORD I am all in

It doesn't matter your style or approach

The important thing is that both Peter and John entered into the reality of the empty tomb that day in their own way at their own time

But both ended up going in... eventually

And John saw and believed

I would invite you to do the same, to enter into this miracle

To respond ...to get it

To see and believe this reality

Because if this *really* happened, and you know I believe with my whole heart with millions of others around the globe that it did...we ought to be sold out completely to a living God who would hold back nothing from us...

Who still moves stones for us...all the time...when we trust him

Who breaks every barrier down to be with us...again and again

And in whose presence, death dies, heaven laughs, and eternal life is born...

Don't you want to get to know a God like that?

Enter into the reality of the empty tomb...

The stone, lifted up... by God's power, no longer a barrier but a witness cries out to us today...

He is risen indeed! Come and see!

Let Us Pray....