

Sermon – Mark 16:1-8
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Grace Lutheran Church
Easter – Year B
31 March 2024

“Who Will Roll Away the Stone?”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!**

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. If you're fairly confident about your answer, you write it in ink. When you're certain, you carve it in stone. A few weeks ago, her church emailed me a picture of the stone, a square of marble now reset in the columbarium wall in the church's lower level. A name and two dates, neat and tidy, a stony reminder that my mom, once very much alive, no longer is. And while my family's grief, like every family's, is unique and particular, there's nothing about it that is out of the ordinary. It is the way of the world. Almost all of us have seen the names of loved ones carved into the stone, reminding us that death is the most basic fact of life. I look out my office window daily, reminded of the saints of Grace. Names. Two dates. Stone.
2. The stone reminds us of what we know in our bones. That grief springs from absence, neverness. The theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff, lamenting his son's death, writes, "It's the neverness that this so painful. . . . A month, a year, five years – with that I could live. But not this forever." But so it is in this world, in which it seems the cold stone of the tomb always gets the last word. And so shall it be until the end of the world.

3. It is in this certainty that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus lay the body of Jesus in the new tomb, as we heard on Good Friday. It is in the certainty of death that Mary, Mary, and Salome go to the tomb early on the first day of the week to anoint the body. But did you know part of the story gets left out? When Joseph goes to Pilate to ask for the body that he may bury Jesus in the tomb, Pilate is incredulous. "You mean that new tomb, the nice one hewn out of rock?" "Yes," Joseph replies." Pilate persists, "That nice corner plot in the garden?" "Yes." Pilate is beside himself. "You mean the expensive tomb that you were saving for yourself? You're going to use that tomb for this disgraced, so-called Messiah? What an absolute waste!" Joseph, giving Pilate a knowing look, says "Ah, it's no big a deal. It's just for the weekend."
4. So, okay. Maybe not. But when the women arrive at the tomb, they stumble into a joke of the grandest scale. The stone, so seemingly permanent, now rolled away. Death, so certain? Now undone. Jesus? He is not here. He has been raised and goes now ahead of you to Galilee. The women react to this news as I'm sure I would, not with comprehension and instant joy but with terror and amazement. Death, if nothing else, was at least dependable. It lasts until the end of this world, its neverness stretching on and on. But on Easter God does a new thing. Stony death is undone. Neverness is not as long as eternity, and the end of the world is not the end.
5. This undoing of death, of course, does not undo our grief. The promise of Easter is not that God calls us to ignore our grief, to look away from it. To just get over it. Rather, the promise of the risen Christ is that God joins us in our grief. Answers grief with love. And then, with the power on God has, does something about it. Makes a future where there was no future. Turns the most basic fact of life – death – into the gateway to new life, abundant and eternal, as the coming Kingdom of God breaks into this world even now. And we, amazed, blink into the rising sun, as we follow the risen Son who goes now ahead of us. Baptized into Christ, the sharp, hard, stony places of our life

are carved by the waters of Christ into glorious new creations. Christ, claimed by death, is alive. The tomb could not keep out the creative love of God. You, claimed by death, are alive. We step once more out of the tomb today, leaving behind our sin and our shame, all that would separate us from God and one another. It is a scary thing, to be sure, this newness of life, this undoing of death's power. Scary. And wonderful.

6. Of this, we are witnesses. While Mark ends his proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus with scared silence, he knew there was more to it. The women were not silent forever, their fear overcome by new faith as they preached the good news of Christ alive, and death undone. We are witnesses with words, telling as Peter did of the One once hung on a tree, raised by God on the third day for our salvation. We are witnesses with works, unfit for the task, perhaps, like Paul before us, but made bold by the grace of God within us. With Mary and Mary, Salome, Peter, and Paul, we are witnesses of the reign of God that breaks anew into our world today. The hard work is done. The stone has been rolled away. Death's power is undone. Your salvation is complete, as Jesus draws you to his cross and goes ahead of you from the tomb, always moving out of death, into life. So let us, dear saints and siblings of the risen Christ, be about the business of life. Giving comfort with the consolation we ourselves have received. Working peace in a world that clings to violence. Giving welcome in a world that looks for reasons to be afraid. Breaking down barriers, for if the stone of death can be rolled away, can any obstacles to grace and mercy stand in our way?

7. Friends, Christ who was crucified is alive. In the midst of this world's pain and our own grief, we rejoice. The words of this world have been forever overcome by the life-giving Word of God. God writes this promise not in ink or stone, but in the life-giving blood of the Lamb. It is written on you, invisibly but indelibly, in the waters of baptism. Jesus Christ has made a way for us, from death into life. Let us follow him. Out of the tomb and into

Galilee. Out of our fear and into the broken places of this world, bearing witness and working love. Out of death and into life. With all the saints, forever and ever. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

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