



It's Not About the Stone

Resurrection of our Lord
9 April 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago, I posted a story on Facebook sharing the painful news of an early Thursday morning event in our home. In our house, my wife and I do our best to balance out the raising of children as best we can. Which means that with one child in high school, one in junior high, and one in elementary school - mornings on school days are divided into three separate events. The junior high student is gently encouraged to wake at 6:10. The elementary student is awakened at 7:05am and the high school student is unceremoniously roused around 7:30am for a delayed start at 8:20. On this particular morning, I was not responsible for the waking of children. While listening to my wife push the junior high student out the door at 6:50am, I made my way downstairs – grabbed a cup of coffee and made my way back to bed. Any yelling that occurs in the morning on my off day is not my problem. I heard the front door close after the junior high student left – the youngest was sent to the bus stop and the high school student even made it out the door on time. A second cup of coffee in hand, I was watching the Today show when I heard my wife yell “ouch” and then a crashing explosion that shook the house just enough to know there was a disturbance in the force, and then I heard a word, which I cannot repeat in your presence. Being the caring husband I am, I yelled after my wife to see if she was okay to which no reply was offered. I decided, for my own safety and well-being, it was better to go down and check. Only to find that my wife was standing in front of the refrigerator covered in fireball cinnamon whiskey with shards of glass and puddles of whiskey as far as the eye could see. The brand new, unopened bottle of fireball had been on top of the refrigerator and over time had slowly slid towards the front of the refrigerator until upon closing the refrigerator door, the bottle fell off. And the great joy of cinnamon whiskey is that it immediately turns into a thick glaze on everything it covers. Add glass shards and a fine layer of white golden retriever dog hair and well, the mess is a work of beauty until you realize you have to clean it up. Now you may ask, Pastor Chris, how did you know that the cinnamon whiskey had fallen off the top of the refrigerator? Well – and really my wife does not know this part yet – but it's Easter so if death is around the corner for me – SO IS RESURRECTION. I knew exactly what had happened – only because five days before this tragedy, I, too, had been standing at the refrigerator and upon closing the door heard the bottle slip off the top of the refrigerator but my ninja reflexes caught the bottle just as it was about to hit me on the head and explode on the floor. My wife was not so lucky. And honestly, I put the bottle back on top of the refrigerator because that is what you do when something falls, right? You put it back and move on. Consequently, this sermon is sponsored by Fireball and there will be samples handed out after communion. Just kidding.

At the beginning of Holy Week, we stood with Jesus before the gates of Jerusalem. We knew that once we entered, we would be swept up in events that we could not control and that would bring us to the very edge of what we could bear, as we walked with Jesus to the cross and the tomb. This week tells us that God is able to change everything about us – our fear, our sin, our guilt. But to receive that change in the living of our lives asks all of us such a revolution in our hearts that we are stunned and frightened at the thought. And it is okay to be afraid. The revolution in our hearts is not ours to complete, it is God's. God is the One who has done a new thing in us. Believe it or not – God was at work long before you knew of the One who calls you by name this day. It is easy for us to hear the story of Jesus' death and resurrection and move on as if nothing has changed. Tomorrow, we will wake up (well that is the plan anyways) and we will easily go on, putting all of Easter back on top of the refrigerator, as if nothing has happened. Except, the power of death has ended – even as we will still face the finality of one last breath in this life – still the power of death is no more.

Just days ago, on Good Friday, I shared these words from Pastor Tony, “the God who loves us is the God who dies for us. If Friday had been the end of the story; if God had not rolled the stone away this day – the power of death – the finality of one last breath – would lead us to nothing. The cross, the grave, the silence, the loss of hope. But God was not finished three days ago. God was still moving in life, in death, in beating hearts, and every breath. To roll away the stone was not the end of the story – it was just the beginning. “The God who loves us,” writes Pastor Tony, “is the God who dies for us...And the God who rises for us.” Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



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"We are a resurrection people, but we're also a people in pain," writes one author. If we begin to count all the ways in which the story of the crucifixion – violence, suffering, anger, grief, apathy, despair – reverberates right now across the global landscape, we might collectively fall to our knees. Never to rise again. Yet, the resurrection of Jesus is the way in which we are able to move on. When Jesus rises from the dead, God moves us on - away from our pain, our suffering, our betrayal, our hopelessness to the promise of eternal life. The resurrection is fire in our bones, steel in our blood, motivation for our feet, a song of lament, protest, and ferocious hope for our souls. The resurrection is what God does with us after the stone has been rolled away. It is God's call to God's people, inside and outside of the church, to speak, to stand, to work for a life in a world desperate for fewer crosses, fewer graves, fewer landscapes littered with despair and the dead. In the resurrection as God declares that death will not have the last word, we stand at the empty tomb and declare with God that all must rise, be healed, and raised by the death-defying love and justice of God.

When Matthew tells us his version of events on that first Easter, he has an almost desperate need for us to comprehend the awesome power of God. Don't get me wrong, I need to hear the story from Matthew's perspective because I can so easily gloss over what has happened. God on cross. God in grave. Earthquake. Angel descends. Angel rolls stone away. Do not be afraid. He is not here. He has been raised! So easily can we hear the story and put it back on top of the refrigerator. Get up. Go to church. Check. Ham in oven! Hunt Easter Eggs. Check. Eat Dinner. Go to bed. Check. Go back to work. Check. Easter back on top of refrigerator. Check. I wonder how the story of resurrection would change if someone read the Easter story with the energy of the Telemundo Soccer commentator Andrés Cantor. "After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone. SSSSSTTTTTTTOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONE!

For all the stones we have known in this life. For every stone so blinding, we cannot see the other side. For every stone so large, we are forced to climb over. For every stone we have carried for fear of putting it down we would no longer remember the importance of the burden. For every stone rolled in front of every grave we have known. I have come to understand. It's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. Are you ready? The stone that sealed the grave. The stone that told us the life of one we loved was at an end. It's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. And what did God do? God rolls it away. For every stone of disease that stands before us like a mountain to climb. It's not about the stone. (Help me out.) It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. For every stone that stands as a broken promise that betrays us. It's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. For every stone that blocks a broken relationship that has lingered too long as a regret. It's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. For every stone of forgiveness we have not offered while we wait for the apology we believe we are owed. It's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. For every stone of unanswered prayer that we hold against God allowing our anger to blind us from every other prayer God has answered. My friends, it's not about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. Whether you allow God the power. Whether you are ready or not. For every stone that stands in your way – God rolls it away.

It's not about the stone. It was never about the stone. No matter the size. No matter the weight. It was never about the stone. It's about what God does with the stone. God rolls it away. This is what our God does. Moves mountains. Waters deserts. Shines light. The blind see. The deaf hear. The lame walk. The lost are found. And the dead. They rise again. This is the power of God. This is promise of the empty grave. These are the stones God rolls away this day. This is the power of God alive in the world. Just look back to what you thought was the end. Only to watch God roll one more stone away. Amen.

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