



Christ United Methodist Church

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Sermon: Stones Are Rolled Away

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Speaker: Pastor Don Archer

I wonder this morning, what particular concerns or worries we bring with us on this Easter Sunday. What occupies our thoughts?

On *that* morning, very early on the first day of the week, after the sun had risen, three women were on their way to the tomb where the body of Jesus had been placed. They were going to anoint his body with spices. Because of the time constraints created by the crucifixion, there had been no time for this ritual at the time of Jesus' death. As the women made their way to the tomb they were discussing a very big problem. Specifically; who would roll away the stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb? When they were within sight of the tomb, they could see that the stone was already rolled away. The entrance to the tomb was open. Their greatest concern had been eliminated.

Isn't that a great feeling? When something that we are worried about, concerned about, afraid of, is suddenly resolved or taken away. I can recall times when I was worried about how I would pay what I owed to the IRS.

On one occasion, when the planets all aligned, I received a refund from the State of Ohio that was within a few dollars of what I needed to pay my dear Uncle Sam. The stone was rolled away. There have been times when I have been concerned about a health issue ... to the point of convincing myself that I had some life threatening condition. An examination and/or testing revealed that things were not as bad as I had imagined. The stone was rolled away.

So it was for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, on the first Easter Sunday. *How on earth will we move that large stone away from the tomb?* When they arrived ... the stone was moved. Problem solved. Of course, as is so often the case, when one problem or concern is resolved ... another one steps up to take its place. The stone has been rolled away for them ... BUT ... the body that they came to anoint is not in the tomb. As they enter the tomb a young man, dressed in a white robe, tells them that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has been raised, he is not here. Go tell his disciples.

Isn't it amazing how the big problem we have at the start of the day can often become replaced with an even bigger, entirely different problem, before the day is over! *How are we going to move the stone? The stone is moved. Hooray! Uh... where's the body that we came to anoint? Gone. Raised from the dead. Go tell the disciples.*

Three women who are left with spices they had purchased to anoint the body of Jesus. Trying to figure out what in the world is going on. The stone is rolled away but there is no one to anoint. Now what? Mark's

gospel tells us that they *left the tomb in terror and amazement and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

Maybe part of the Easter message is that whatever our fears or concerns, God is already at work on a solution. Whether we know it or not. Whether we can believe it or not. When the two Mary's and Salome left for the tomb they could not have known or believed that the stone would be rolled away. The fact that Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised from the dead, rolls away a lot of stones. The resurrection is a reminder, a proclamation, that nothing is impossible, nothing is final. The women at the tomb were instructed by this mysterious person in a white robe to, *go tell his disciples, and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. He is going ahead of you.* The good news, is that wherever we are going in life, whatever we are facing in life, **He is going ahead of you.** Stones, obstacles, problems, fears, doubts, are already being rolled away.

I visited with a man who was going to the hospital for a series of tests and possible surgery. I asked him if he was afraid. Yes and no. Was his answer. *Yes, I am afraid of having surgery and just being in the hospital. No, because I believe that when I get to the hospital, God will be there waiting.* I envy that kind of faith. The belief that **he is going ahead of us** wherever we are headed. He is going ahead of us to the tomb, where the stone has already been rolled away. He is going ahead of us to the hospital. He is going ahead of us as a loved one begins rehab. He is going ahead of us as the chemo treatments begin. He is going ahead of us as we confront this huge

boulder called aging. He is going ahead of us as we make plans about college, a new job, a new location. He is going ahead of us and is waiting for us to catch up.

When the women discovered that the stone was rolled away and they entered the tomb, they were told: *Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.* On this Easter, if we are looking for Jesus, if we are searching for faith and meaning in our lives, we will not find it in the past, we will not find it in the present, it is ahead of us. The past is important. Our present situation is very real. It is, however, in the future, ahead of us, that we will encounter the risen Lord. Jesus is not where he is supposed to be. By that I mean that he is not dead. He is not entombed. He is not restrained by a stone. He is beyond all of that. He is ahead of us and calls us to be where he is.

On that first day of the week, so many years ago, Jesus had gone on to Galilee, waiting for his followers to join him there. On this Easter Sunday, he is wherever our greatest fear and our deepest hurt and our most overriding doubt may be. He is there, ahead of us, waiting for us to catch up, waiting for us to join him.

I don't know where you will be tomorrow or what this coming week will hold for any of us. I *believe* that wherever we are, whatever we may be facing, God, in Jesus, is at least one step ahead of us.

Let us not waste our time trying to figure out who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb. Let us live our lives in the confidence that the stone has been rolled away. And because that stone has been moved, that obstacle taken away, we can live in the hope that the very best that God has to offer is still ahead, waiting for us to discover. *There you will see him, just as he told you.*

Amen.