

Sermon for April 1, 2018
Easter Sunday
“Who Will Roll the Stone Away?”

Mark 16:1-8

Who will roll the stone away? It was bright and early on the first Easter morning that the women made their way to the tomb. The Bible tells us that they were bringing spices to anoint Jesus' body for burial. The crucifixion had ended too close to the Sabbath for them to do the job on Friday. So, the body had been placed in the tomb unanointed. Anointing the body was women's work and these women knew they had work ahead of them. It was hard enough to anoint a loved one for death. It would be even worse on the third day after his death.

On the way they began asking themselves who would roll away the stone. Now, I can understand this, but some people can't. I am one of those people who is always thinking one step ahead. In fact, my way of dealing with stress is to worry about the details. Going to anoint for burial the body of one you thought was the Messiah must have been pretty stressful. So to alleviate the stress they worried about some detail to take their minds off the real dilemma

These women had a job to do. It was a nasty job, but it was theirs to do. They also realized that due to the unique circumstances there was a major obstacle in their way. A large stone that was too large for a small company of women to move. So, they asked: “Who will roll away the stone?”

Who will roll the stone away? This can be a metaphor for our lives. Sometimes people in our world are entombed by stones of greed and sin. Self-centeredness and sin has them in its grip. We as Jesus' followers are called to go to them and help to free them from that.

But the stone of sin is too large for us to move. You can't force people to do right. We can try to persuade them, but most people will not be persuaded. They would rather sit in sin. And even if they were to try to roll the stone away, it is too big for even them to budge.

Who will roll away the stone of sin? Who will take away the rebelliousness of the human heart? Who will remove the filth immorality that covers our hearts? Who will roll away the stone of sin from the doors of our hearts and open them to the love of God?

Who will roll the stone away? Sometimes people are entombed by stones of oppression and poverty. Christians are being martyred around the world as we speak. And even in “free” countries, like America, Christians often find themselves at odds with the social and political powers of their time and place. Then there are others who are imprisoned because of their race, religion or political views. And many people feel caught in a cycle of poverty that they are unable to stop.

Jesus calls us to love our neighbor and do something about it. How can we claim to love God if we cannot act lovingly to our neighbor? A loving person will not just stand by and watch another be hurt needlessly. But the job is too great for us. We can't possibly right all the wrongs of the world. We are incapable of making everyone act righteously to their neighbor.

Who will roll away the stone of oppression and poverty? It is too big for me and you and all of us put together to move it. We can push at it here and there, but it still remains.

Who will roll the stone away? You know most people don't even care. You tell them that people are dying of hunger, they ask for seconds of cake. You tell them that the environment is being ruined, and they complain that recycling takes too much time. You tell them that their neighbors are dying in sin, and they say it is too much trouble to invite them to church. You tell them of ethnic cleansing in other lands, and they say, "Well, somebody ought to do something!"

The apathy of the human race seems immovable. It is a moral inertia that keeps the body politic and the body of Christ at rest. And it is too big for us to move. No matter how hard we push, people just don't care.

Who will roll away the stone of apathy and indifference? Who will make people care enough to change the way they live? Who will release the moral will of the human race from its tomb of non-caring attitudes?

Who will roll all these stones away? I guess we need to get back to the story. That, after all, is what the women asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away?" And what happened? Who rolled the stone away? Can anyone tell me? Was it an angel - was it God - was it Jesus himself? Actually, Mark doesn't tell us. All he says is that when the women got there it was already rolled away.

But that was just the beginning! Not only was the tomb open for the women, but their reason for opening it in the first place had sat up and walked away. Instead of Jesus' decomposing body they found a man in heavenly garb who tells them that Jesus is risen. They came there to touch and see a dead body, but instead they witnessed the resurrection.

That's the way God works. We can't, on our own, do all the things that Spirit moves us to do. Our little contributions seem to be just a drop in the bucket. But God is able to, and often times already has done it. We just haven't seen it yet. Instead of fretting like those woman about how we are going to be able to do all that God calls us to, perhaps we should anticipate the resurrection that God will bring forth.

What are the stones that entomb you? What is it that makes your life seem dead? What are those things that imprison your spirit? Is it selfishness, materialism, apathy, destructive habits, bad attitudes, prejudice, sin?

God can roll away any stone. God can take whatever keeps our hearts captive and make it go away. God can wash away our sin and make us truly care. God can open our hearts and bring all the deadness back to life.

Don't worry about how you are going to do all this. Just learn a lesson from the woman. Instead of fretting about how you will do what God calls you to, just stand back and watch the resurrection take place in you.