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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Who Will Roll Away the Stone?

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Mark 16:1-8

It was in the shadows of early morning when the women made their way to the tomb. They were on the way to do some necessary final things.

The disciples had scattered, most had abandoned the city. Judas had hanged himself, and they were still wondering about Peter who had denied knowing Jesus.

It was still dark as they made their way. Max Lucado captures the ‘darkness’ in saying that it was...

dark with Peter’s denial
dark with the disciples’ betrayal
dark with Pilate’s cowardice
dark with Christ’s anguish
dark with Satan’s glee.

They were making their way to the tomb, a mission of simple devotion. It was their responsibility and they expected nothing.

Jesus had been crucified. He was dead. They had placed him in this tomb. As they moved through the early morning darkness they were, as the wonderful preacher Barbara Brown Taylor titled her book, *Learning to Walk in The Dark*.

Now we might think of that as a negative, the dark, the darkness, and when you look up dark and darkness in a dictionary, it seems to bear that out.

But when you go back and read the biblical stories, it’s a different story.

In Genesis, the darkness is where God begins working creation. In Exodus, God promises to come to Moses in a dark cloud on Mount Sinai.

In other words, the darkness is a divine dwelling place for God.

Abraham meets God in the darkness, Jacob wrestles God in the middle of the night, and it was while shepherds watched their flocks at night that angels announced the birth of Jesus.

There's so much that happens in the dark that is essential to the Christian story, like the story of these women on their way to the tomb.

They come to the tomb where Jesus had been signed, sealed, and delivered to death, where they had buried their own hearts full of love for their Lord.

We've all walked that path, a path the world always seems to be leading us down. Think about it, the world was still 'Easter-less' at that moment.

The 'no' of death was the last word they had heard late that Friday afternoon. They walked the path that has been walked these days in so many neighborhoods and streets and homes and hospitals in the valley of the shadows of death.

Maybe we feel that way, too, as if the world is 'Easter-less': those fears, those burdens, the worries, the troubles, the shadows that darken our lives.

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But listen to Reverend Taylor when she says: “If you are willing to enter the cloud of unknowing and meet God in the dark, maybe even the dark of a tomb, you might be in for a surprise.”

And so the women were surprised. Surely as they walked, they began to whisper and a question came up, a very practical question: “Who will roll away the stone for us?”

It is a question that moves beyond the practical, though. I have never believed that the stone was rolled away so that Jesus could get out. He didn't wake up and start shouting, “Hey, somebody let me out! I'm alive”

The one who conquered death needed no one to roll away the stone for him.

The stone was moved for us, for you, for me.

First of all, the stone that covers a tomb is a problem and seems so permanent, doesn't it? The gospels go to great length to tell us it was huge stone.

The stone is reality, and the question has an air of desperation about it; maybe they had been in such a hurry, they hadn't thought of it until just now, “Who will roll away the stone?”

The truth is this year we Christians are experiencing Easter Sunday like no other. The stone is huge, isn't it?

That is why it is more important than ever to be with those women at the tomb where the first Easter began.

Think about it, the resurrection was first announced, not in some big congregation with all the trappings, but to this small group of women in the darkness.

And Mark says the women fled from the tomb for “terror and amazement had seized them.” The words are even stronger in Greek: *tromos* (trauma) and *ecstasis* (ecstasy). Trauma and ecstasy had seized them. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Although Mark does say that the women were afraid and told no one, the fact is we are reading the story, so we know these women told someone.

As to their fear, when you look back in Mark’s gospel, this is the reaction, awe, wonderment and fear that characterize the way many characters respond to Jesus’ miracles.

The women’s fear is not a fear as if they are running from a threat. Rather, they have experienced something of God, a reality that changes the equation of life forever.

My friend Paul Baxley says it well, “As we gather in homes all over our communities and the world, as we join together virtually and in the power of a love that will not let us go, might we not offer a very different but unmistakably beautiful witness to the resurrection of Jesus?”

The rolling away of the stone rolls away whatever it is that darkens our world so that we can see the truly incomprehensible power of the risen Christ, the light of God’s love.

That is how it was at the first Easter, and how it needs to be for you and me today; carried out in homes and in hospitals,

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by nurses and doctors, by firefighters and police officers and EMT men and women, by truck drivers and grocery store clerks and food delivery drivers, by the mail carriers and online teachers.

The stone is rolled away to reveal the clear shining light of the risen Lord, so we see who we ourselves can be, to fulfill our ministry as brothers and sisters of the risen Christ.

This Easter, let us lay claim as never before to the world-altering, life-changing truth: Christ our Lord is risen. And may the response come from homes all over the world: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!



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