

# WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY?

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ March 27, 2016



When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side,

and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " <sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8)

Christ the Lord is risen today, alleluia!

Three women who knew and loved Jesus, bought and prepared spices and incense in order to go to the tomb of Jesus. Because that is just what you did for a dead body. Even though Jesus had told them time and time again, that he would not only die at the hands of the Jews, but that he would rise again. This was the scene on that first Easter morning, the day Jesus rose from the dead.

Early in the morning, just as the first streaks of sunlight crept over the horizon, those three women – Mary from Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Salome were making their way outside of the city of Jerusalem to the tomb Jesus had been placed in only a few days before. It was only a week ago, they thought, that Jesus rode into Jerusalem triumphantly on a donkey, and now he was dead. This man whom they thought was the Messiah, the Savior of the Jews. But he was more than that to these women. He was their friend. And anyone who has lost a loved one would know what they were feeling as they trudged to the tomb.

They were saddened by the loss of their friend, their mentor, their teacher, now they didn't know where to turn. They were afraid that those who put Jesus to death might come after them. And yet, even this was not enough to have them neglect their duty to properly prepare the body for burial. As they walked, they went down their mental checklist of everything they needed to properly prepare the body for burial. It was because of the Jewish belief in a resurrection from the dead that they handled the dead bodies with such care. As they went down the list, they had remembered everything for the preparation. But the one big thing they forgot would literally stand in the way of them carrying out their loving task.

It was the large stone rolled in front of the tomb to prevent wild animals and grave robbers alike from breaking into the tomb. Some of these stones weighed as much as an average car today – several thousand pounds. And while a groove hewn in the rock made it easier to move, it was still no easy task, often requiring several men to move. You can see the reason why the three women asked each other the question, **“Who will roll the stone away?”** But not long after the question left their lips was it replaced with a different question – WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY? For as they approached the entrance to the tomb where Jesus’ body lay, the stone that weighed as much as a car had been cast aside, leaving the entrance to the tomb open.

The question, “WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY?” is just as important for us to answer today as it was for the women on the first Easter Sunday. Because it reveals what has been done and what is still left to do. WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY?

1. The one who wants us to look inside
2. So we can go and share with those outside

(1)

One of the great parts about the Bible, and especially the books detailing the life of Jesus, is that when you want some more details, you can find them in another book. That is precisely what we can do to answer the question, WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY? Another gospel writer, Matthew, records for us that an angel came down from heaven and rolled the stone away and sat on it. So that’s it, it’s all settled, we know WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY. It was God who sent an angel to roll the stone away. But why exactly?

At first, we might think that if Jesus was in the tomb, God sent an angel to roll the stone away to help Jesus get out. But the Bible says that’s not the reason. Jesus didn’t need an angel to let him out. Rather the stone was rolled away to let people see in. Which is exactly what the women who were coming to the tomb that morning did. They stepped inside the entrance of the tomb and were immediately greeted by an angel. He is described as a young man dressed in a white robe. This very well could have been the angel that rolled the stone away.

It’s no wonder the women were alarmed. They didn’t expect to see anyone living in the tomb, especially someone they had not met before. But this messenger of God had some wonderful news, in just a few short words he preached the greatest sermon ever preached: **“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.”** The angel motioned over to the stone slab and said, **“See the place where they laid him”** to point out clearly his words were true. Remember, they had come bearing spices to bury Jesus. Now all of that was pointless, there was no body to prepare for burial.

It’s almost become second nature for Christians to believe in a miracle like the resurrection, but think about how miraculous that is. Someone who died, and had been dead for three days, became alive again. But it was not just any someone, it was Jesus, who promised he would do it before it happened. It was Jesus who did it not only for himself, but for us as well. What’s so important about the miracle of this resurrection? We heard about that in the second lesson we read from the Bible, from a book called 1 Corinthians.

In that section, God, through the Apostle Paul wrote, **“For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”** You see, the Bible is very clear what is wrong with this world. Sin is wrong with this world. Sin is more than just the bad things people do, it’s even the bad thoughts that we think. In fact, the Bible says that sin is imbedded in our DNA. And the one undeniable result of sin in this world is death. The reason people die is because of sin. This is the death that came through a man, the first man – Adam, when he took a bite of that forbidden fruit. But the resurrection of the dead also comes through one man – Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place, he died an innocent death in our place, and now his resurrection is a guarantee that we will rise. Because the stone in front of Jesus’ grave was rolled away, we know the stone in front of our grave will be rolled away.

This is why it was so important to know not only WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY, but WHY THE STONE WAS ROLLED AWAY. It was rolled away so that we could look inside and find no body. Whether you realize it or not, this event is the catalyst for all of human history. Without this definitive event there would be no Christian Church. Without this definitive event, we would have no hope of getting to heaven. This is why Easter is so important, it shows how strong our God is. Not only is he strong enough to remove a couple ton boulder from the mouth of a tomb (which he created by the way), he is strong enough to defeat death, first for Jesus, and also for us.

(2)

This was the news that the women were to take in on that first Easter morning. News they weren’t expecting to hear. The one they had come to anoint was not there to anoint. Then the angel gave them additional instructions. Leading to the second reason WHY THE STONE WAS ROLLED AWAY. **“Go, tell his disciples, and Peter.”**

WHY WAS THE STONE ROLLED AWAY? It was not only rolled away to let people see in, but to share with those outside. The angel gave the instructions to the women to tell this wonderful, earth-shattering, amazing news with Jesus’ closest disciples. He no longer was dead, he was alive again. At first we might expect that those who had encountered angels and a miracle would have no trouble sharing this good news. But what do we hear, **“Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”**

Now, we know they eventually did go and tell the disciples, but that doesn’t mean they weren’t afraid as they left the tomb. What reason would they have to be afraid? The news caught them unaware. They had just been in the presence of a heavenly being. They had come expecting something Jesus told them not to expect. All of this wrapped up is part of a believer’s healthy fear and respect of the almighty God. It is the same fear that believers show today.

It is the fear and respect of God that helps us not to take for granted the message we have heard, but keeps us coming back again and again to hear the news. It is the fear and respect of God that helps us love God’s Word and take it seriously in everything that it says, even if we don’t agree with or understand it all the

time. It is the fear and respect of God that helps us to listen to the angel's words to "Go, tell others about the resurrection," and take them to heart, so that we might overcome our fears, our hesitation, our trepidation.

We have a God who has conquered death. A God like this will certainly give us the strength, the courage to share this message with others. This news is bigger than we are, because our God is bigger than we are. Maybe to those of us who have heard this news for many years, we have forgotten how good it really is. It's news that sweeps us from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven. This is what Jesus' resurrection means. This is **WHY THE STONE WAS ROLLED AWAY**. After all that you have heard, after all that you know, the question is not how can I share this message, but how can I not share this message that has changed my life?

It is this message that we get to hear week in and week out here at Grace Lutheran Church. It is a message that invites us to look again and again to the empty tomb of Christ for strength and comfort. It is a message that encourages us again and again to go out and share it with others. I sincerely hope that everyone here today, whether you're a member or a guest, takes this wonderful news to heart.

The women went to the tomb on Easter morning wondering, "**Who will roll the stone away?**" That question changed to "**WHO HAS ROLLED THE STONE AWAY?**" The answer to that question gave them a healthy mix of fear and joy as they hurried to tell others what had happened. The best thing that can happen to you as you leave here this morning, is to have a similar healthy mix of fear and joy. The fear of knowing the power of the almighty God, and the joy of knowing what that God has done. For by Jesus' resurrection we know **WHO WILL ROLL THE STONE AWAY** from our graves. Amen.

Happy Easter!