

**Title:** Who rolled the stone away?

**Text:** Mark 16:1-8

**Context:** Easter Message

**Proposition:** Everyone believes in the Resurrection because God still moves stones.

A farmer was out plowing in his field one day. He noticed that the plow caught something large. The tractor pulled and pulled, without moving the plow. Something large and heavy had anchored the plow deep in the soil. The farmer climbed down his tractor to see what was causing the problem. Yes, he hit a large heavy stone that the tractor could not move. He wondered who would be able to remove the stone.

With the Sabbath over, three women bought some spices to preserve Jesus' body. They approached the burial site, as the sun was rising. On the way they anxiously asked, "Who will roll away the stone from the tomb for us?"

The tomb had a large disk-shaped stone lodged into place across the door. Although, it would be easy to roll this big, stone disk down to the door, it would take several men to roll the stone away.

Surprisingly they saw that the large stone had been rolled back. Whatever the cause, curiosity forced them to walk right in. Alarmed they found only a young man sitting on the right side, dressed all in white.

He said, "*Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the one they nailed to the cross.*" When was the last time you went looking for

something? Someone? Sometimes, we do find it, but something is different about it. I suppose it is like the wonder of a child who plants a seed in the ground and later returns to that same spot and finds a flower rather than a seed.

The stranger continues, *“He’s been raised up; he’s no longer here. You can see for yourselves that the place is empty. Now--on your way. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You’ll see him there, exactly as he said.”* They got out as fast as they could, their heads swimming with such thoughts as, “Who rolled the stone away?” “Where is Jesus?” “How can this be?” “Did God roll the stone away?”

The empty tomb immediately started to change lives. These women went and told other Christ followers that the stone had been rolled away. They searched for Jesus. If we join the women in wondering and seeking, in going and telling, we join millions in the experience of meeting the one who can still move stones. We can have the joy of coming upon the Risen Christ who calls us by name. We can find Him in our Galilee, that place where we have met Him before. We can leave our tomb, those dark places of the heart because the stone has been rolled away.

Satan and sin had us trapped or sealed in a tomb, keeping us from the joy of life. Jesus entered this tomb in our behalf so that He would pay the price for our freedom. He sets us free! God rolled away the stone. Easter means that we have a place in heaven and that we are set free by the power of the Resurrection. **Easter is**

**not so much about the fact that we can live forever, but about the fact that we can live extraordinary lives now.**

A little boy and his father drove down a country road. Suddenly, a bumblebee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became stiff with fear. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, closed his hand around it, and then released it. When he let it go, the boy became frantic again as it buzzed by the little boy. His father saw his panic-stricken face. Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his hand. There still stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. “Do you see this?” He said. “You don’t need to be afraid anymore. I’ve taken the sting for you.” This, my friends, is an image of Easter’s Power. We do not need to be afraid of the deadly effects of sin and even death itself. We don’t have to be afraid of failure because in Christ we are more than conquerors. We don’t have to be afraid of rejection, because God has adopted us into His family. We don’t have to be afraid of poverty because our Lord will supply all our needs. We don’t have to be afraid of being vulnerable, because He is our strength. We don’t have afraid of not having enough faith; because He arouses faith the size of a mustard seed. Friends, Christ Jesus faced and conquered death for us. He shows us his scars. By His victory, we are saved from both the penalty and the power of sin. Christ Jesus has taken the sting! “Thanks be to God who gives us the

victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15: 57). **God has removed the stone of fear.**

The disciples had trouble believing the news of the empty tomb. Over the next six weeks Jesus provided more than sufficient evidence that He was alive. The Bible reveals that Jesus showed up in ordinary ways: Mark tells us that Jesus appeared while the eleven were enjoying dinner. Luke tells us that two men walking to Emmaus met Him. John reveals that the Risen Christ appeared to Mary weeping in a garden. Each time, Jesus shows up in their midst and declares, “I am not a ghost.” Touch my scars. Watch me eat! It is I myself! Ghosts don’t eat bread. A mirage can not be touched. Even though the disciples possessed some doubt, sufficient faith quickly awakened them to the presence of the Risen Christ.

So, is there any hope for us who have never seen the Resurrected Christ with our physical eyes? Perhaps the Risen Christ’s words to a once doubting Christ-follower can help us? Jesus said, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” It seems to me that eyes of faith invite encounters with the Living Christ. Without faith, it is impossible to connect with Jesus. Will you have faith this day? Will you open your mind’s eye to see Jesus? Will you invite the living God to remove the stone of doubt from your heart? He wants to reveal Himself to you for our world is anxiously waiting for testimonies of hope.

God convinced the first Christ-followers that He still moves stones. What else but the Resurrection can explain the dramatic change in people's lives? The resurrection invites belief. So, why should we have faith in the God who removes stones?

**First, we can believe in the God who still moves stones because there is something in us that yearns for hope in the midst of death.** In 1999, a tornado stormed through the Cincinnati area, leaving behind a trail of destruction and death. Five days before the tornado hit, Ryan Cook, a UD student, was visiting with his parents and older sister. Mother and son were talking and singing while Ryan played his guitar. For some unknown reason, they broke out in singing "Amazing Grace." Five days later the tornado seized his parents from their beds and flung them to their death. In a moment this young college student lost both parents. Ryan was asked by a UD Flyer News reporter, "How can faith in God help people through tragedy?" Cook responded, "I struggled to reconcile my emotional loss with a belief in a loving and sovereign God. The only way I could reconcile these two paradigms was through hope in eternity, a very real hope that I would once again hold my mom and again, play old blues songs for my dad." Cook never considered abandoning his faith during this tragedy. He said, "A lot of being mature as a Christian, or being mature in anything, is to separate what you know to be true from what you're feeling." What Ryan Cook knows to be true is that God still moves stones. Christ is

Risen! He is the Resurrection. The Resurrection says that if Jesus was raised from the dead 2,000 years ago, there is an answer to the death of Ryan's parents in 1999. They too are raised to a different life in eternity.

**Second, we can believe in the God who still moves stones because evil has been conquered with the power of forgiveness.** One of Jesus last words on the cross were, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus gathered up on his parched lips everything that makes us cry out against heaven. We cry out, "How far can evil go in this world? How far can lies and clever manipulations go? How far can you cover up the designs of evil in the cloak of good and religion? It can put the Son of God on a cross; crucifying him on misquotations and false allocations. Friends, evil may prevail on Friday and Saturday. But not Sunday! God conquered evil by overcoming death itself. God rolled the stone of bitterness away and open the tomb with the power of forgiveness.

The movie, The End of the Spear tells the true story of a group of Christian missionaries in Ecuador who set out to reach the Waodani, a violent Ecuadorian tribe defined by revenge killing. Even when Mincayani and his tribe spear the 5 men from this group to death, the wives and children of those men move into the Waodani tribe to teach them about God's love. In this scene the adult son of one of the murdered missionaries and Mincayani revisit this traumatic event. (Clip) God still moves stones with the power of forgiveness.

**Finally, we can believe that God still moves stones because of changed lives.** Hopeless lives have been impregnated with hope and courage because Christ is alive. Meaningless lives have been given meaning because Jesus was caught alive. Guilt-ridden lives have been set free by the power of forgiveness. The empty tomb changed the early followers of Jesus. Yes, they saw him personally and they were compelled to faith because they have seen and touched the Risen Christ. But “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Such faith simply requires a simple decision to have the faith of a child.

One day a little boy was playing in his sandbox. He had toy trucks, bulldozers, a small, plastic red pail, and a plastic blue shovel. He moved sand from one end of the sand box to the other in order to grade a road for his trucks. When he was shoveling some sand into his pail, he noticed something hard. It looked like a rock. He dug around that rock. The more sand he moved from around the rock the larger it became. Finally, he was able to get underneath this huge rock. In order to get it out of his sand box he pushed and pulled it as best as he could over to the sand box wall. After much effort he got it over to the wall and attempted to lift that large rock up and over the edge of the sandbox wall. He tried several times. Sometimes getting it on the ledge of the wall, only to have it fall back into the sand box. His father happened to witness this unfolding drama from the back porch. The boy grew tired, frustrated, annoyed and angry to the point of tears over his inability to remove the

large rock from his sandbox. Suddenly, the boy realized a shadow and he looked up and saw his father standing there.

His dad asked, “Son, have you used all the resources that are available to you?” The boy quickly said, “O course dad, I have used everything that I have.” “No, you haven’t son, you have not asked me to help you,” the father said. The father then reached in and lifted the large stone out of sand box. God still moves stones.

In the sandbox of life, we may have a large stone that we have been trying to remove. It may be guilt from a failed relationship or the living of a lie or anxiety over personal finances. It may be an illness, the death of a loved one, or bitterness toward someone who has hurt you. No matter what it is, you have tried to remove it, but it remains in your life. God wants to remove your stone. All you have to do is ask him. He takes delight in moving stones. He still moves stones.

One evening when the girls were small, Melinda & I were reading the story of the death of Jesus and His resurrection. When we read the story of his death, the girls were visibly shaken. We could see the sadness in their eyes. Then we came to the part when Jesus came back to life. All of a sudden, Kelsey spontaneously clapped her hands and shouted, “Yeah, Yeah!” Ilea, Melinda and I joined in this act of joyful praise. “Blessed are those who have not seen 'the empty tomb' and yet believe in the one who still moves stones.”

