

## He Still Moves Stones

On the first Good Friday, Jesus' dead body was wrapped in linen strips and placed in a tomb carved into a hillside. A large stone was rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb. (Mark 15:42-47) Mary Magdalene and some other women witnessed this. Early on the first Easter morning, these women went back to the tomb in order to properly anoint Jesus' body with spices. They wondered how they were going to remove the stone from the tomb.

When they arrived at the tomb they found the stone rolled away. Inside the tomb they found an angel who announced that Jesus had risen from the dead, had gone to Galilee and would see his disciples there later. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene later the same morning. (John 20:11-19) She told the disciples all these things. Peter and some other disciples went to see the tomb. They saw the stone rolled away. They saw linen that had been wrapped around Jesus' body just lying there. They did not believe.

St. John's Gospel reveals that the evening of the first Easter Sunday, the disciples gathered in a secret location in Jerusalem. They shut and locked the door to the house. Jesus had kept them safe by his miraculous power. He had given them purpose and hope. They came to believe they would reign on earth with him. Jesus and his protection were now gone. They feared retribution and death at the hands of the religious and political authorities that had killed Jesus. Their consciences were wracked with guilt. Peter had denied Jesus and the others had abandoned him. The room and the locked door pointed to their own entombment. They were imprisoned by their fear and guilt. The locked door, was the large stone that sealed the entrance to their tomb. How could they be saved from this tomb? Who would roll their stone away?

John's Gospel declares that the locked doors and windows could not keep Jesus out. He miraculously appeared among his disciples. He showed them his hands and feet with the nail holes intact and his gashed side, evidence of his crucifixion and death. He announced peace to them. The nail holes and wound in his side preached a sermon to them. The words of the Prophet Isaiah had been fulfilled: "*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*" (Isaiah 53:5). By his innocent suffering and death, Jesus had rolled the stone away from their hearts and minds, freed them from their sin and guilt and opened the way to new life for them, for this life and for eternity.

Some things have not changed much from that first Easter Sunday. I, like the disciples, often become entombed in the same way. Something happens, a button is pushed and I begin to think of a thorny situation from the past. A time when I hurt another by my actions and then the other turned around and hurt me. As I replay the situation in my mind again and again I am grieved and shamed of my own un-Christian actions toward that other and angered by the hurt inflicted by the other on me. I demand that the other suffer for the trespasses against me. I just can't stop thinking about it. I become a prisoner in my own mind. Circular thinking holds me hostage, it locks the door and throws away the key. I am trapped. How can I be saved from this tomb?

When the Gospel is proclaimed to me, Jesus appears in my tomb. He reminds me of King David and the many sins he had committed: adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. King David confessed this about all the sin he had committed: "*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*" (Psalm 51:5). King David boldly declared that all sin, regardless of the identity of the victim or perpetrator, is, in the final analysis, against God. God is thus completely justified in punishing me for the pain, loss and grief I caused others and punishing all those who caused my pain, grief and loss. I need this stone rolled away.

The Gospel shocks me and causes me to see my life in a different way. The situation which caused my circular thinking is not about determining which of two sinful people was just and right. The situation is about God and how God is maligned and grieved by me, and the other person involved, in a sinful exchange. Jesus reminds me that he has taken my punishment upon him. He was pierced for my transgressions and

by his stripes I am healed. He has freed me from the sins I have committed. He rolls that stone away. He opens the door for new thoughts to enter into my mind. A deep desire to forgive those who have hurt me; a deep desire that Jesus would move those whom I hurt to forgive me; and a prayer that Jesus would make peace between us. Hope arises.

Got a stone that needs to be rolled away? The Gospel is proclaimed at Grace Lutheran Church every Sunday morning at 9:00AM (Contemporary with Praise Band), and 10:30AM (Traditional Service). We also have a healing service the last Wednesday of every month at 6:00PM. See you there. In Christ, Pastor Ed Skutshek