

John 20:1-18
He is Alive!
Easter Sunday March 27th, 2016

The final stone has been removed! The Temple curtain torn in two, torn from top to bottom. Jesus is alive!

Can you say that with me? **Jesus is Alive!!!**

What a day! What a beautiful glorious day! It's perfect Spring Arizona weather. The sky is blue, the flowers blooming, the birds singing and this Patio/Sanctuary is dressed in the splendor of the season.

It is Easter, my friends, the day of Resurrection. The One who was dead is now very much alive!

The disappointment and depression of the Crucifixion on Good Friday has been replaced with the Joy of this day. Let us repeat the oldest confession of the Christian Faith: repeat after me

He is Risen!

He is Risen indeed!!

It is my prayer that the truth of that simply confession may come alive in your lives...today, tomorrow and forever.

In all the Gospels it was the women who first went to the tomb on the first Easter morning. It was the women who first learned of the Good News of the Resurrection and began to proclaim it to the world.

In the Gospel of John, Mary is the only women mentioned going to the tomb. From the other Gospels we know that she wasn't the only one. She would have come with burial spices to prepare Jesus' body.

But most probably she went there to grieve the death of her friend and teacher. She needed to mourn and wonder what might have been.

But when she arrived at the place where they had laid Jesus on Friday night the large round stone that had closed the tomb was rolled away.



Immediately she jumped to the conclusion that grave robbers had stolen Jesus' body. Vs. 2 “So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

She assumed someone had stolen the body so she ran back to tell the others of her discovery.

But Peter and the other Disciple were not content simply to hear about the news; they had to go and see it for themselves. They ran to the tomb. Out of fear, or curiosity, or anticipation, or anger we don't know; but the scripture tells us that they ran.



Now the Gospel of John is assumed to have been written by the Apostle John, but in the Gospel he is never named. He is just called “the other disciple”. This was on purpose; so that future readers in the centuries to come could be that “other disciple.” We are “the other disciple” with Peter as he ran.

The other disciple got there first but he chickened out. He couldn't bring himself to enter the tomb. He simply stood there and observed the grave clothes, but Peter, impetuous Peter, he charged in. Peter simply went home puzzled. The other Disciple saw and believed. Now they did not yet **“understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.”**

But they saw and believed. They did not yet understand, but do we? Do we understand the full implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead the mystery of new life in Christ that grows in understanding and power all our lives?

It is not a coincidence that the first clue to the resurrection of Jesus Christ was that the stone had been removed. The theological implications are enormous. Jesus did not need to remove that stone to get out of the tomb. That night he appeared in the Upper Room having passed through locked doors or walls.

We needed the stone removed to see that he was alive. This was something that Mary could not do herself. The final stone was removed by God.

When Jesus was buried on Friday a giant stone disk was placed between Jesus and the people who loved him. Though Mary went to visit Jesus' grave, she wouldn't have been able to see him if the stone was in the way. It was a barrier that she was unable to move herself. Somebody had to do that for her. And Somebody did, a great big Somebody: God.



Throughout the season of Lent the members and friends of this congregation have been on what we called a “Journey of Stones” from the work of Steven Milon. Every Sunday when we entered the Sanctuary we would pick up a small stone and carry it into worship. That stone would become symbolic of our sins that are a barrier

between us and God and others. At the end of each sermon we would lay our stones of sin at the foot of the/this cross.

One stone stood for someone's pride, while another stone stood for someone's lies. One stone symbolized a couple's broken marriage vows while other stones stood for sins of gossip, slander, prejudice, adultery, evil speculation, anger and hatred. By the end of Lent the base of the/this cross was covered with stones: our stones, our sins.

Just like the stone in front of the tomb we can't remove those stones, those sins by ourselves. Someone has to do it for us. And Someone has: Jesus Christ.

Probably you can't see the base of that cross this morning, but I can, and I can tell you it's empty. All the stones are gone. All the sins are removed. They were paid for in full on the cross.

That is the ultimate message of Easter: what we could not do for ourselves, God did for us.

Every pastor knows that on Easter Sunday, he or she is preaching to people who are not regular worshippers. Perhaps some of you are in worship today for the first time in years...perhaps some for the first time ever. You have sins, yes? We all do.

Sins are things that separate us from God and each other. Sins break relationships damaging ourselves, others and the world. You've done things.

And maybe that is the reason you have stayed away or today you came here looking for forgiveness and hope. Some have stayed away because of shame that has been too much to overcome. Well it's actually too much for any of us to overcome, which is why God in Christ did it for us on the cross.

Today, it is my privilege to tell you, to remind us all that the stone has been rolled away. The barrier between us and God has been taken away. You may think your sins are too great to be forgiven, but you're wrong. Like it or not it's already been done. The stone is rolled away! The sins have been forgiven for 2000 years. The Savior Jesus Christ has chosen to love you.

There is a story about an old vaudeville comedian named W. C. Fields. He was a notorious atheist. One evening, before his performance, an assistant came into Field's dressing room and caught Fields reading a Bible. Embarrassed, Fields slammed the Bible shut and said, "Just looking for loopholes!"

What Fields was actually looking for was grace. What he was looking for was forgiveness...a second chance...a way to start over.

Easter is the ultimate loophole!! It is when Jesus made good on his promise to rise from the grave; all of his promises became reality: His promise to forgive sins,
to be with us wherever we go,
to give us eternal life.
Jesus made good on all these promises and more.

Today we are surrounded by the evidence of Easter. The flowers, the hymns, the confident voices of our friends who boldly claim "He is risen...He is risen indeed!" It's easy to believe in the resurrection when we are all here together...but what about tomorrow?

What about Tuesday, or next Saturday, or later next month? What about when people let us down...or when loved ones die... or when the sins of our lives overwhelm us again? Will Easter then be just a distant memory? How will we believe then?

For those here today looking for God, and I've spoken to people who are as desperately looking for God as Mary looked for Jesus on that first Easter. Look for God where God can be found. Remember

your experience here today: the encouragement of your faith within the gathered...”gathered” people of God.

Remember when Mary went to the tomb...she brought Peter and “the other disciple” who you remember is us. Peter and the other disciple then left. They too, so desperately wanted to find Jesus Christ, our God, but they left the place where he could be found, so that morning they did not find him.

Mary stayed and Jesus appeared to her and spoke to her and comforted her and then guided her in how to tell the Good News that he had risen. That evening Jesus appeared in the Upper Room where 10 of the disciples were gathered... hear that word “gathered”. Judas was dead and Thomas missing. Those 10 found Jesus!!! Thomas missed out until the next Sunday when Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples again.

The point is the best place to find God is where God shows up!! God shows up most of the time among his people who are not defined by their holiness, sinlessness and righteousness, but by their love and search for God. Jesus promised wherever 2 or 3 of us gathered in his name he’d be there and he is.

I encourage you, if you are looking for God, to be active and present among God’s people: us sinners. Jesus is a friend of sinners. You will find that Jesus is alive and his life gives you abundant life here on earth and sets you free.



In 1988, the night the Berlin Wall was torn down, there was a young woman named Anna who lived in East Germany. She was asleep when her friend pounded on her door and woke her up to say, “Anna, the Wall is down, and we have freedom! You must come and see!” When you have good news you want to share it.

They ran down to the gate that had divided east and west for 30 years, and it was true. The Berlin Wall had been toppled. The barrier was down. For 3 hours they partied on the border. They ran back and forth between East and West, they drank beer and danced with soldiers and then went home exhausted.

The next morning, Anna woke up and thought she had dreamed that experience; it all seemed too good to be true. Quickly she got dressed and ran back to the Wall and saw that it was true. But this time, before she left, she picked up a piece of that wall and took it home. It was a tangible reminder that she was free.



As you leave today, you too, will be given a reminder that you are free. The barrier between you and God is gone.

You will receive a prayer pebble marked with the word “Alive!”

May it be for you a reminder that you are free! May it be a reminder that you are released from the shame and penalty for your sins! You are free to be alive! And if the Son makes you free you are free indeed!

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit amen.

Now we will be reminded by the sacrament of Holy Communion that Jesus through his death and resurrection has indeed removed the barrier of sin, the stone set between us and God.

The beauty of this sacrament is that everywhere and at any time we eat bread and drink juice or wine we can remember.

Please turn to page 13 in our hymnals. (or watch the screen)