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**Weekend of Sunday, April 4, 2021**  
**Easter Sunday/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Acts 10:34-43**  
**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**  
**Gospel Reading: Mark 16:1-8**  
**Sermon Title: “Rolling Stones”**

**Theme**

*Christ is risen! Jesus is alive, and God has swallowed up death forever. With Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, we may feel astonished and confused, unsure of what to make of the empty tomb. But this is why we gather: to proclaim, witness, praise, and affirm the liberating reality of Christ’s death and resurrection. In word and feast, we celebrate God’s unending love, and depart to share this good news with all the world. Alleluia!*

**Text**

<sup>1</sup>When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus’ body]. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <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>But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## Sermon

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Are you sure? Because the evangelist Mark left a lot of room for confusion and doubt. I mean, I wasn't there. I doubt any of you were there. Those whom Mark recorded were there, only took a mysterious white-robed stranger's word for it. How can you trust that? And then they fled the scene <sup>8b</sup>**for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.** And then, arguably, Mark's Gospel ends ... sort of. Actually, it has two more endings, for a total of three. So take that to the jury. Perhaps we should review the evidence.

Where we left off on Good Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Sanhedrin, and I believe at least an admirer of Jesus, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Having been granted his request Jesus's bruised and battered, cold and lifeless body was taken from the cross, hastily wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid in a borrowed tomb. And then a stone was rolled against the door of the tomb. Please remember this because this will be an important part of the story. Mark also mentioned one more important detail; <sup>47</sup>**Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.**

Saturday was the Sabbath and by Jewish law, no work could be done. But then our "resurrection story," if you want to call it that, picked up early the next morning. Mark recorded that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Clopas were going to do for Jesus what was only decent - give him a proper burial, complete with the washing of the body, anointing it for burial, and then adding spices to remediate the stench of death and rotting flesh.

The two Mary's were there to see the tomb closed, so they knew where it was and what they were up against when they returned. They took with them one other companion, Salome. Salome was present at the crucifixion. John recorded that she was there, so she had witnessed the worst of the day, but then perhaps escorted Mary, the mother of Jesus, home. We can only imagine that having seen him breathe his last, all hope for her was lost.

Mark recorded that it was <sup>2</sup>very early on the first day of the week when the sun had risen when they went to the tomb. Along the way, it seems they remembered the obstacle that awaited them when they would arrive – that stone. They knew they couldn't roll it away, (Mark noted that it was “very large”) and so they wondered out loud what they would have to do. And it was then that they arrived at the burial site and to their amazement, the stone was rolled away. How convenient!

When they looked inside the tomb, I suspect not knowing what to expect, and they were *alarmed* to see a young man dressed in white sitting where the body had been laid – did I mention they were alarmed? The stranger in white said, <sup>6</sup>“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.” Too late, they were already alarmed.

You heard the rest of the story. It's all quite bazaar. The stranger told them to go tell the disciples to go to Galilee where Jesus would meet all of them and they could see him there. So of course, they went home and told no one. And that's the end of the story. Thank you for coming, please leave your offering in the plate.

Seriously, that's was Mark's original conclusion. Have you noticed that no one has actually seen the risen Lord Jesus? That is why I asked you if *you were sure* that Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! I wasn't there. I doubt any of you were there either.

True story, look in your pew Bibles – oh that's right, you can't do that – COVID! When you get home look up the end of Mark's gospel in your Bibles. It ends where our Gospel Reading ends, and then there are two additional endings. The first additional ending is called “The shorter ending of Mark” and is one more verse. And then there is another ending called – you'll never guess, “The longer ending of Mark.” Most annotated Bibles will give an explanation of how this might have happened, but I suspect someone took Mark to task and said, “Dude, you can't just end the story like that” and so he or someone else added the other endings.

I entitled this sermon, “Rolling Stones” because I am a child of the '70s and this mess with the conclusion leaves us without “Satisfaction.” “We can't get no satisfaction!”

Seriously, I have a couple of questions for you. 1) Who rolled the stone away? Just shout out your answers. I have no idea. I don't think it matters, but I know this – it wasn't Jesus. 2) How do I know that? Because Jesus wasn't in the tomb. Oh the dead body of Jesus was indeed buried in that tomb and the stone that was "very large" was indeed used to seal it, but the resurrected body of Jesus cannot be contained – by a tomb or a stone or anything else.

The stone wasn't rolled away so that Jesus could get out, it was rolled away for the two Mary's and Salome, and for the others they were supposed to tell. In other Gospel renderings, some of the disciples went to verify what the women told them and they looked in and verified that it was empty. The stone was rolled away *for them, and us*, not for Jesus.

True story: Shortly after I arrived at the little church up north, I noticed that the window in the office didn't closed properly. I fussed with it but it had jumped out of its track and I couldn't get it back in the track from inside. So I went outside and the minute the door closed behind me I knew I had messed up. The door was locked. Well, this was before cell phones and I was new in town, wouldn't have known whom to call anyway, and yea, my keys to my car were on the same keyring inside the office. So I decided that it was a good thing that the window wasn't closing properly because I was going to have to get back in through that window. I was about halfway in when I heard the voice of Officer Smith asking, "Whatcha doing?"

The point is that doors and windows are supposed to keep things out. That is what they are supposed to do. We have at least ten ways to get out of this building and although the doors are supposed to close and latch on their own, sometimes they don't close all the way, so we ask the vergers and our custodians to walk the physical plant and push on the doors at the beginning and the end of their shifts so we don't get unwanted intruders. Doors and windows are supposed to keep things out.

But this resurrected Jesus doesn't operate by the same set of rules. The same laws of physics don't apply to him. He is:

- unleashed,
- unfettered,

- undeterred,
- undiscouraged,
- unyielding,
- untiring,
- He can go through stone.
- A few days later, he'll go through walls and doors.
- He just shows up here and there, just when he is needed.
- Though the Mary's and Salome did nothing according to Mark,
- He revealed himself to his disciples and empowered them with his Holy Spirit.
- From that point on, they began to preach and teach and perform signs and miracles themselves.
- They liberated prisoners,
- healed people of all kinds of diseases,
- brought people back from the dead,
- spoke fearlessly,
- and we are here today because that stone was rolled away, not because Jesus needed to get out, because he wasn't there, but because *we* needed to see that the tomb was empty.

The need for the resurrected Jesus has not gone away. The healing he did, he still does.

What is the stone that holds you in your grave? Is it:

- Addiction,
- Anxiety,
- Abuse,
- Fear,
- Worry,
- Disappointing relationship,
- Broken relationship,
- Mental illness,

- Physical illness,
- Poverty,
- Hunger,
- Fear of dying,
- Fear of living,
- COVID-19,
- The vaccine for COVID-19.

Listen to me, your stone *has been* rolled away. The tomb of your issue has been opened. Look not at your issue, turn around and look into the eyes of the resurrected Lord Jesus, because he is there, as he has always been, and always will be. You are free! We are free! Free to live the redeemed life, because he has set us free.

Although indeed, the gate to the Garden of Eden, a metaphor for life eternal with God in heaven had been closed by human sin, through the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ, it has been opened, unlocked, the padlock and the key thrown into the sea.

So the ending to the Gospel of Mark is awkward. We don't know how the story ends in Mark. There are numerous loose ends! Could it be that it is intentional and Mark is a genius?

Maybe Mark in his genius ended his resurrection story as he did so that there is room for us in the story because the story of Jesus Christ is not over yet. The story does not end with his Passion, his death, not even his resurrection. Oh, he was resurrected, but not to the same earthly life. He was resurrected to a new life, one that is not limited by this mortal life but is overflowing with possibility and an unimaginable future. Our future, like the tomb, is open – ever open.

The incompleteness, the messiness of Mark's Gospel ending just maybe on purpose so that we are reminded that God in Christ isn't done yet. Isn't done with us, and isn't done with creation.

Alleluia! Christ *is* risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**