

Easter Sermon – “Rolling Stone”
Scripture Reading – John 20:1-18
Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

Listen to the events of the first Easter morning as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 20.
Hear now God’s Holy Word.

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 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." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that Christ must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord;" and she told them that the Risen Christ had said these things to her. Amen.

The title of the sermon: “Rolling Stone”

The text: *Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. John 20:1b*

Let us pray. Risen God, on this joyous morning, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

A Season of Stones! The journey to this day began with Jesus refusing to turn the stone into bread in the wilderness when he is tempted to abandon his humanity. Jesus resists, not because he could not do it, but because he chose to accept the limitations that are a part of life and join us in our humanity.

During Jesus’ ministry, when the religious leaders want to stone a woman caught in a sexual relationship with a man who is not her husband, Jesus bends down and writes with his finger on the ground, perhaps wondering where her partner is, and by pausing Jesus disrupts the self-righteous, misogynous tension and offers perspective through the gift of time and silence. When Jesus stands up, he invites the one who is without sin to throw the first stone. Curious, isn’t it, how being in Christ’s presence calls one to authenticity and honesty. No stone was thrown that day and neither did Christ condemn the woman.

As Jesus’ ministry culminates with his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday prior to the last supper, trial, crucifixion and resurrection, the crowds welcome him with praise and adoration. When some of the Pharisees ask Jesus to order them to stop, Jesus replies *if these were silent, the stones would shout out.*

And here we are on Easter morning confronted with the meaning of yet another stone. The Gospel of John tells us *Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been moved.* Furthermore, the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke describe the moved stone as rolled away from the tomb...the rolling stone.

Three centuries before the stone was moved on that first Easter morning, the Greek philosopher Aristotle sought to prove the existence of God as the Prime Mover of all the motion in the universe. Implicit in the name, the Prime Mover moves all other things, yet is not moved by any prior action. Aristotle described the Prime Mover as perfectly beautiful, indivisible, contemplative, and intellectual.

From the Christian perspective, as well as beautiful, indivisible, contemplative, and intellectual, the Prime Mover is also omnipotent. Some have expressed the paradox of God’s omnipotence in the theological dilemma: Can God create a stone so heavy that even God cannot lift, roll, or move it?

Perhaps the greater paradox of God’s omnipotence is how the Prime Mover, the Creator of the ends of the Earth, and the God whose understanding is unsearchable could embrace the limitations of our humanity, be so moved with compassion throughout his ministry, and absorb the hostility of the world on the cross.

Two centuries after Aristotle and one century before the Prime Mover rolled the stone from Christ’s tomb, the Roman commentator and former slave who won his freedom with his wit,

Publius Syrus, wrote the proverb: *A rolling stone gathers no moss* to convey the need for momentum in liberation and revolution.

During the tumultuous 1960's Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan would capture this kinetic metaphor of the rolling stone to embody in rock and roll the social movement towards a greater justice, honesty, and authenticity for all God's children.

Today we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we proclaim with Christians around the world that the Prime Mover rolled away the massive stone, our loving Savior could not be contained in a tomb, and death is not the last word.

The good news does not deny that suffering, sacrifice, and death are a part of each of our lives. The good news does affirm that our Omnipotent, Risen God has the power to move, bringing life out of death, salvation out of sacrifice, and redemption out of suffering.

This day of resurrection, we are moved to rejoice in the mystery of Christian faith: Jesus Christ risked death and brokenness to give us life and make us whole. In Christ's willingness to absorb the hostility of the world on the cross, we encounter a healing and life-giving God on Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene came to the empty tomb and saw the stone moved, rolled away.

Christ, our Lord, is risen indeed. Hallelujah! Amen.