**Roll the Stone Away**

**Based on Mark 16:1-8**

I can remember some incredible times at the beach in Vancouver when I lived there as a young boy. In the summer we would often go down to Lumberman’s Arch, or Third Beach to swim and play all day. And I learned some important lessons.

One, the sun can give you a nasty burn. I don’t know how many times I went home redder than a Spartan Apple. Of course, Sun Screen was not really in vogue then.

One of the other important lessons I learned was what incredible life existed in the tide pools. Underneath the barnacle coated shoreline rocks were some amazing things. Roll a rock over and the first thing that happens is several small shore crabs scurry for cover. I used to pick the odd one up once I realized they didn’t bite. Looking closer I could usually find two or three small minnows darting around in the shallow water left under the boulder. You could also catch small centipede-like things or find the spot where a clam had just been. If you were unlucky, you could get clam spray right in the face. You just never knew. It was always an adventure and provided hours upon hours of enjoyment.

There wasn’t much enjoyment, at least initially, when the women visited the tomb where Jesus was laid. They had intended to perform a ritual blessing through the anointing of Jesus body with spices and likely fragrant oil too. To their horror, the body of their Lord has been removed, presumably stolen.

One can well imagine their reactions, both “terror and amazement” as we heard from Mark’s Gospel account. The young man in a white robe sitting inside the enclosure likely didn’t help. Folks in those days were no less surprised than any of us would be, to see such an image whether or not it was angelic. And to hear it speak? Would you not flee in terror too?

It is interesting though when you think about it, that behind that stone, as beneath a stone on a rocky beach, there was the offering of incredible promise. New life had emerged. The foretelling of the resurrection would be realized. The promise of Jesus’ return would unfold in visions. Accounts of his appearances with Mary and the disciples would be reported and remembered.

Although the resurrection was prophesized, we wonder I expect if any of Jesus’ followers at the time of his death actually believed it would come true. The last few chapters of Mark suggested there was doubt among the disciples. But amazing transformations can occur in our midst when stones are rolled away. Jesus lives today in the hearts and through the spirit of all that believe what he taught was truth. He lives in the discipleship work we are all dedicated to.

Of course, discipleship work can be challenging if not uncomfortable, and unpleasant. Stones can be stubborn.

In her Lenten Study, Lent in Plain Sight, Jill Duffield suggests that “When others see insurmountable barriers, boulders impossible to move, people of faith see the possibility of God’s glory revealed in life-giving ways.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It can be that way in arenas throughout the world.

In far away Myanmar, formerly Burma, the military coup continues to be resisted by civilian protesters who insist on a return to democracy. They face at present what seems be an immovable boulder of authoritarian rule by a corrupt military. Yesterday alone over 100 protesters perished during the struggle for their voices to be heard. We pray that a return of civil rights comes to fruition, and that hope for transformation lays behind the stone of oppression.

Many of us our praying that the monstrous stone of Black Racism might be irrefutably moved, as the trial surrounding George Floyd’s death continues. Another tragic and unnecessary death of an unarmed black man by brutal police force, seems to have become a catalyst for transformation. “Black Lives Matter.” What will be behind the stone remains to be seen, but there is opportunity for an incredible resurrection. Perhaps racial discrimination will be revealed and finally recognized as a societal reality and a way paved for real change. Transformation is possible when stones are rolled away.

Easter people like you and I believe in transformation through resurrection. It may not be in the form of a physical bodily resurrection as was observed by the disciples in the Gospel times. But the resurrection promise is alive no less today that it was then. It comes when seemingly unmovable challenges are faced head on by regular folks like us who know something better is possible and try to make it a reality.

 Jesus’ return to those he was known too on Easter Sunday many years ago is something we experience today when we push against rocks barring the way to right relationship, truth and reconciliation, equality regardless of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Christ’s resurrection is not just possible, it is probable.

Yesterday I had a phone call from my five-year-old Granddaughter Athena. She asked me if I knew who was coming tomorrow. I replied, “Santa Claus?” She said no, “The Easter Bunny. “And so, I asked her, “what is so special about that?” Well of course she replied, “because the Easter Bunny leaves chocolate eggs and stuff.” “Are you excited,” I asked her? “Yes.” It was a most definite yes.

This Easter morning Athena and millions of other children will be very excited when they hunt around their homes for treats. They will move things around looking besides, under and behind them, to see what surprise might be there. It reminds me of my time at the beach when I would look under rocks to see what exciting critters were waiting for me.

As an adult, moving stones aside is more difficult, but it sill excites me. It excites me because I am never sure what I may find. Miracles are not always there, but I am convinced they are always possible. With your help, I am convinced if we keep at it, rolling stones away gives Jesus a chance to break through again and do something new.

Quoting author Jill Duffield again, “All of us encounter seemingly immovable stones. We face loss or illness, disappointment or depression, oppression or exploitation, grief or separation. Circumstances unimaginable become all too real and we feel the pain of slamming into a boulder that refuses to budge. If we remember Jesus’ resurrection, and all he taught and lived, angels whisper, “Jesus is risen. Transformation happens. Death does not have the last word.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

On the individual level another promise awaits. Facing our own boulders can be terrifying and exhausting. The struggle can leave us raw, and wear us down. There appears to be no way out of a suffocating fog surrounding us.

Eastertime however reminds us that rolling the stone away can let God’s brilliant light into the darkened tombs we find ourselves in. In that light our own rebirth can begin.

The resurrected Christ is a powerful antidote to the pain and suffering we witness and experience all too often. Stones are no match for the unconditional Love which comes our way in resurrection’s promise.

Thanks for listening this morning,

Amen

1. Jill J. Duffield, Lent in Plain Sight, A Devotion Through Ten Objects, p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)