

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought perfumed oils, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. Very early, just after sunrise, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb.

They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

On entering the tomb, they saw a young person, sitting on the right, dressed in a white robe. They were very frightened. But the youth reassured them, "Do not be amazed! you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was crucified. He has risen and is not here. See, the place where they laid him. Now go and tell his disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

They went out and fled from the tomb, bewildered and trembling, for terror and amazement had seized them; but they said thing nothing to anyone, because they were so afraid.

Who Will Roll the Stone Away?

Easter begins with fear... the kind of fear that feels a lot like heartbreak. It begins with the twist in your stomach that comes when the phone rings in the middle of the night; it begins with that moment when you realize that hope is gone.

Three frightened women approach the tomb early in the morning. They bear precious herbs and oils to wash the body of their Lord. They have come to comb out Jesus' hair, to wash away the dried blood, to massage precious myrrh into his skin. They have come to anoint the crucified one.

They leave in the early morning, seeking safety in the breaking dawn, before everyone else is up. As they walk, they talk about all that has occurred. Their beloved teacher gone forever: The agonizing death, and then carried away to his tomb.

Where was the dramatic salvation, when God would swoop down and change everything? As the stone was rolled to close up the tomb, their hopes and dreams were closed up too.

It wasn't that long ago, they say, that Jesus had emerged out of the wilderness, proclaiming these beautiful words:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Now the promises were gone... hope was buried in the tomb with Jesus.

But even in death they did not abandon him. They creep out as the darkness rolls away, carrying precious oils and spices, ready to care for their beloved's dead, cold body.

“Who Will Roll the Stone Away?” they ask.

Who will roll our fears away? Who will repair the broken dreams that crumble like the Key Bridge? Who will give us hope for an uncertain future? Who will inspire us, now that Jesus is gone? Who will proclaim the good news?

Who Will Roll the Stone Away?

But even as the question leaves their lips, they arrive at the tomb and find that the stone has already been rolled away.

They walk in, their fear rising.... And, the tomb is empty...
empty except for a stranger who is definitely not Jesus.

But still they are afraid. Perhaps they fear that their last chance to pour a little compassion on the broken body of Jesus is gone. They fear that they are witnessing the final insult to horrible injury: first, Jesus' life is stolen, and now, even his body has been taken. They fear that death has won and literally swallowed up their beloved friend.

The young man, robed all in white, offers some surprising news to comfort them. "**Do not be afraid**," he says, "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. 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."

This is, of course, the news we have all been waiting for:

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed!

The tomb is empty, not because of anything people did, but because there are some things that even the awful power of death cannot destroy.

But even now the women are still afraid. After hearing these hopeful words, Mark tells us that the women fled in fear and told no one of what they saw. This is where the original Gospel of Mark ends – no resurrection appearances, no good news. It ends with fear and silence.

And yet, we know that this is only the beginning; Easter begins with fear but ends with joy. The fears are swept away in the face of the Risen Christ. The women will tell someone. Jesus will appear to the disciples. They will understand the amazing implications of resurrection. Peter will find the words needed to share the gospel news to the poor, the captives, the oppressed. Jesus ministry will continue in the Body of Christ, which we are members of today

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed!

Today our hopes are risen as well *because Jesus' resurrection is not just about Jesus*. The resurrection is really about God, and our relationship with God.

Jesus didn't raise himself, God raised Jesus, and in that amazing moment, God conquered death.

Jesus preached a message that made many people uncomfortable... even angry... but brought hope to so many more. He broke bread with, blessed and forgave the ones the rest of

turned away from... and he gave them hope. Then he told us that **GOD does the same thing.**

When you meet Jesus, you meet God

His willingness to stand up against traditional thinking about God was a huge part of his journey to the cross. In his death, the only ones who were afraid were those who had found hope in his radical message.

And that Hope was resurrected with Jesus Christ. Hope that could not be contained in a tomb or controlled by frightened leaders. In the empty tomb we discover that Hope is on the loose again.

And that hope is still on the loose, swirling and twirling among us. Our fears are rolled away, just as the stone was, and our hopes and dreams are set loose with Jesus. God is truly with us!

On this Easter morning, we do not need to be afraid. God at God's weakest point is stronger than anything else in the world, and we can be assured that the good news of Jesus continues. Go out today into the sunlight to continue God's dynamic work of preaching good news to those who need to hear it most: the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed!

Let us bring about the year of the Lord's Favor!

God is with us, my friends. Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen indeed. Alleluia, alleluia and amen!