

To God Alone Be The Glory

Maybe you've noticed this too: Everyone processes things differently. Two people can hear the exact same story, or live through the exact same emotional event, and have two different reactions to it. For instance, some people love it when I ask the children to come forward for a lesson. There are others who don't like this, but you can hardly get them to say so out loud because they know how much most people like it. Another example: on Good Friday some of you prefer to attend our 1 P.M. service because you find putting a Nail of Remembrance into the Styrofoam cross helps you connect more deeply with Jesus' death on the cross as your Savior. And so you were a bit bothered that we didn't use the Nails of Remembrance this year. But you still prefer the 1 P.M. service, because you don't like the evening service on Good Friday where we turn the lights off a little at a time. Others of you, however, prefer to attend our 7 P.M. service because the deepening darkness helps you connect better with Jesus' death on the cross as your Savior; but you do not like sticking a nail into the Styrofoam cross and were relieved when we didn't do so this year. Everyone processes things differently. Let's say you and a friend witness a car accident. You might be able to describe the event to the police in detail, but when your friend tries to answer questions, your friend has to grab a bucket.

In our text for this glorious Easter

morning, Peter and Mary were trying to process two sets of contradictory information. ¹They knew Jesus had died horrifically. ²They also knew his body was gone from the grave. But they couldn't get these two facts to line up. We might say: the stone was rolled away from Jesus' tomb, but Jesus' followers still had stones in their hearts that needed rolling away. The Easter message did the trick. So we learn: **ONLY JESUS CAN ROLL AWAY STONES.**

As we're watching Jesus roll away stones from the hearts of Peter and Mary Magdalene, think about the stones that block up your heart. Could this be the day Jesus rolls away your stones through the Easter message? I'd like for you to see how Jesus' resurrection has meaning for every day of your life.

Let's go back to Good Friday. What would you have said to Peter after Jesus died? How would you have tried to comfort him? "Peter, don't take it so hard. You'll get over denying Jesus. All his disciples ran away, not just you." That's the way the world tries to deal with guilt. "In time you'll forget about it." Or: "Wait long enough and you'll get numb to your guilt." Or: "Just tell yourself, 'It's not so bad what I did. Others have done a whole lot worse.'" Or: "Come on, Peter, lighten up!"

I suspect that in your life you have felt as bad as Peter after you sinned against God.

Imagine you had a big argument with a close relative or a friend, maybe you even called them a nasty name. Then, before you apologized and reconciled with the person, that person died. What words of comfort could make you feel better when the last words you spoke were angry words? *Is this the day that the resurrected Jesus rolls the stone of pride or hurt or anger from your heart so that you reconcile with someone you've wronged, or those who wronged you, while you're all still alive?

Remember the last thing Jesus heard Peter say? It was in the courtyard of the high priest on Thursday night. Peter swore, "I don't know this Jesus you're talking about. I've never met him." Just then Jesus and Peter looked each other straight in the eye. I wonder how hurt Jesus was. Sometime earlier Peter had professed, "*You are the Christ, the Son of God.*" Peter walked on the water with Jesus. Jesus pulled Peter up when he doubted and began to sink. And then on Thursday night Jesus heard Peter pretend not to know him at all. I wonder if the look on Jesus' face was burned into Peter's mind all day Friday. Did Peter even go to see Jesus on the cross? I imagine the disciples sitting around all day Saturday in stunned silence. Can you see Peter, stewing in his juices, a stone of guilt blocking his heart?

But now it's Easter morning, and here comes Mary Magdalene trucking in from the tomb with the scoop that somebody

has stolen Jesus' body. Can you see Peter and John sprinting to the tomb? As he ran, was Peter recalling any of the times Jesus foretold that he would rise from the dead? Was Peter already planning what to say if he found Jesus alive? Didn't matter. Jesus nor his body were at the tomb. The burial cloths were lying there: I imagine the linen strips, collapsing like an empty shell on the space where Jesus' body used to lie. And there was the head-cloth neatly folded, off to the side. This couldn't have been a rush-job grave robbery. Mary must have gotten the story wrong.

The angel had removed the stone from in front of the tomb, but the stone in front of Peter's heart was not yet rolled away. Luke tells us that Peter left the tomb, wondering to himself what had happened (Luke 24:12). But Luke also reports that Jesus appeared privately to Peter later that day. Can you understand why? Jesus knew the guilt Peter was carrying with him from the courtyard of the high priest. *I sure wish I could have been there to hear their exchange. I imagine an "I'm sorry, Lord." I'm certain there was a "Peter, I forgive you." That's how the resurrected Jesus rolled away the stone of guilt from Peter's heart: "I'm alive and I forgive you." *What stones of guilt are blocking up your heart? Have you ever have denied knowing Jesus or acted like he is not your Lord and Savior? Or maybe you went away from home for a week, or for four years, and you lived a life that said, "I don't know Jesus; I am

not one of his followers,” and now the memory of your foolishness still lingers. Maybe you failed someone close to you. Maybe you abused alcohol or drugs or food or a person or your income. Maybe you tried sex outside of marriage.

Only the resurrected Jesus can roll away such stones. He couldn't do that if Mary's report were true (that someone stole his body). So do you see how Jesus' resurrection is relevant to your today and tomorrow? He's alive! So he hears the words you speak every time you confess your sins. He's alive to work through the words you regularly hear from your pastor, "I forgive all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He's alive to help you start a new life again today. But guilt is only one of the stones Jesus can roll away. **2. He will also roll away the stone of a broken heart.**

The Bible tells us that Jesus had driven seven evil spirits out of Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). She and several other women followed Jesus around and helped support his ministry out of their own means (Luke 8:3). That's not much of a biographical sketch, but it's enough. Satan had bound her, but Jesus set her free. The mercy of Jesus motivated Mary to set her interests aside and follow him. If anyone told her, "Mary, get a life," she could reply, "I have life and I have it to the full"—well,

at least until she saw Jesus die, and witnessed his burial. Now her heart was broken.

She must have loved Jesus dearly. She was among the first to come to the tomb that morning to anoint his body with spices. Imagine the distress of coming around the bend in the road only to see that the stone was already rolled away from the tomb. She leaped to the conclusion that someone had stolen his body.

Now she is exhausted after three one-way trips to, from, and to Joseph's tomb. Peter and John are long gone, so she just stands there outside the tomb crying. *Those of you who have lost a loved one can identify with her. She's not just grieving a lost friend. How can she now follow a dead Savior?

Then those two nice men in the tomb ask her such a dumb question: "*Woman, why are you crying?*" No sooner than she answers that question, some gardener guy is asking her the same question, as if she really shouldn't be crying: ¹⁵"*Who is it you are looking for?*" Wait. How does he know she is looking for someone? "I'm looking for a dead guy. Someone stole him. Was it you? Just tell me where the body is so I can put it back where it belongs, in this grave."

The resurrected Jesus knows just how to

roll back the stone from her broken heart: “*Mary.*” Can you hear the gears grinding in her head as the facts fall into place for her? He’s alive! She grabs hold of him. Now that she has found him, she’s never going to let him out of her sight again.

O Mary, Mary, stop rolling another stone in front of your heart. Or as Jesus puts it, “*Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’* (v. 17).

Mary, help me out here by taking the Easter message to my disciples. Help me roll the stones away from their broken hearts.”

Now how is Mary supposed to be happy about Jesus leaving again soon? Follow me closely on this one—it’ll help you realize how relevant Jesus’ resurrection is the next time you stub your toe or lock yourself out or do something sinful like overindulging. Yes, Jesus will go away from Mary in 40 days, but what’s he going to be doing up there at the Father’s right hand? Oh, just stuff, like protecting you from harm and danger. “Protecting me? I just stubbed my toe!” Yes, but did you break it? Will it heal? More importantly, did you learn greater patience or deeper reliance on the Lord? Or does he need to let you stub your toe a few more times to help

you grow in your ability to deal with difficulty. Does he need to let you beat your head against that wall a few more times before you stop relying on yourself and put yourself totally in his hands? Jesus lives! And because he lives, after having gone to the trouble of paying for all your sins, he’s going to make sure you have lots of opportunities to trust him, praise him, pray to him, worship him, hear his promises—even if it means sending you trouble that will be good for you. And why would the resurrected Jesus do all that for you? Because he doesn’t want this life to derail you from eternal life. He wants you in heaven with him forever. He lives to work toward that goal. He even lets lots of good things happen to you whenever it will help draw you closer to him. He wants you to have joy in him.

Jesus knows how to roll away the stones that block your heart from having his joy. That’s what he did for Mary. He used his Word on her. He always lives to use his Word on you and me. In fact, didn’t you come here this morning to experience the power of Jesus’ resurrection, to hear your Savior say by his rising that he indeed loves you, to be reminded that Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that God has cancelled the debt you used to owe him? Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. All who believe in him will live, even if they die. When there are stones blocking your

heart, remember: the resurrected Jesus
always lives to roll away those stones
through his Word. No wonder you
keep coming back to God's house
Sunday after Sunday for more of God's
Word. **ONLY JESUS CAN ROLL
AWAY STONES.**