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**Easter Sunday - April 17, 2022**

**“STONES”**

**Read: Luke 24: 1 - 12 / Memorize Luke 24: 5 – 6 a**

The first Easter morning was not like ours. We have come joyously to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. They were all in the pit of grief. Jesus had died on Friday; put into the tomb. The preparation of His body had been hasty. Luke tells us three women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, packed up the spices and oils that would be needed to finish the preparations for His burial.

I am sure that the women did not put all those elements together to joyously head out to the tomb. I cannot remember a trip I have made to the cemetery that I would describe as joyous. There may be some relief that a loved one, who has suffered, is at rest. But joy is pretty absent at the grave, even for those who are in Christ.

Some think that Christians ought not to grieve because they know Jesus and His promise. But Paul doesn't say that we should not grieve, but that we should not grieve as “those who have no hope.” There's a great big difference between those two things.

We know where the disciples were: in an upper room with the doors locked “for fear of the Jews” as John tells us. Many of them were absent at the death of Jesus, having abandoned Him the night before.

As the women head for the tomb they confront a dilemma. They know there's a stone in front of it. How will they get that stone moved so that they can do their final tribute to Jesus? Certainly those Roman soldiers are not going to help them. They are there to guard that tomb and insure no one steals the body of Jesus. If that were to happen the followers of Jesus could claim He had risen.

When the women get there the stone has been rolled away. The women enter, only to find the tomb empty. Then miraculously two men, “who gleamed like lightning stood beside them.” Luke goes on to tell us that in their fright the women bowed down in homage.

The angels start their message with a question, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!” Transformation is possible for us because we believe in a Savior who rose and now sits at the right hand of God, the Father.

The angel was proclaiming what we know, that death no longer has power. It cannot separate us from God, or each other. The promise of the resurrection is that the enemy of mankind has finally been defeated. That changes everything for us. There is life beyond this life, a life of peace, joy and celebration that overcomes all the stones that might appear to close off our life.

The women heading for the tomb could not know this. They were bringing the preparations for burial. They were discussing how to deal with the biggest impediment to giving Jesus' body its final care. I believe God brought the women to the empty tomb so that they could share it with the grieving disciples.

We each handle grief differently. For some it is important to visit the grave. Others rarely go to the grave. There is nothing wrong with either. There is no right way to grieve. It is not that one loves more, the other less. For those who believe in transformation we know that the grave is not the last place. Jesus' resurrection assures us of that.

The resurrection does far more than just assure us of heaven. The Resurrection also assures us that when we face stones in life, we have a Savior who will be with us. It assures us that even though we sin, Jesus has paid for those sins and we need not fear death. It assures us that all are being transformed.

Some find that transformation comes quickly; for others it takes place over time. As we walk with Jesus, grow to know and trust Him more, we come to see the stones of our lives differently than those who don't have faith.

When the stones that we think are insurmountable are resolved, we come to trust more and more that promise of Jesus that He will always be with us. He will help us find our way. He will guide and direct us in that way.

As Jill reminds us, "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." Jesus warned us of this. We live in a world that has been impacted by sin. The devil wants us to think he has won and Jesus has lost. That's how he saw the cross.

Our joy is that we see the cross from the side of the empty tomb and resurrection. Jesus did not lose, He won. He fulfilled God's plan. He was obedient to the will of His Father and therefore won the victory that we could not. As the angels remind us, "He is not

here. He has risen!" So we also experience the transformation of that death to life experience of Jesus. Sometimes, it can be a very dramatic transformation.

A number of years ago, a young couple came into this building to go to an AA meeting on the evening before Thanksgiving. They had misread the schedule and thought they were coming to meeting. It turned out to be a time of worship. It was very informal. We sat in the darkness of the Gathering Space with candles burning around us reading scripture, praying and singing hymns. We invited them to join us and they did.

In the following weeks they continued to come, although eventually he would return to the life of drugs and alcohol. The young woman wanted more. She wanted love, acceptance and a new life. She found it here in Jesus, but there were bumps along the road.

She got arrested for possession. While she was serving time in jail, the people of Good Shepherd ministered to her. When she got out, they helped her. They provided the family she needed to support, encourage and help her. We baptized her.

She got excited about Jesus and the change He was working in her. We got excited about being part of it. As she got to know Jesus better, she made better decisions about how to live His gift of life, abandoning the stones that had kept her in bondage and blocked her from living what God wanted for her. She began to find the fullness of life that Jesus had always intended for her.

That transformation changed us. It was a very vivid and visible image of how God works to change lives. We can rejoice that we were part of that life changing experience. She has moved on but the impact of her transformation touched other people's lives. She continues to be a witness for Jesus. That's the greatest transformation in any life!

Does transformation mean we always understand what's happening? Does it mean that all of our questions get answered? Does it mean that we'll never have any doubt? No. There will be times when stones appear in our lives. The stones of doubt, despair, sadness and looming death, among many others.

But the resurrection of Jesus reminds us that they only have the power we give them. That He has come among us to proclaim life everlasting. This temporary journey we are on is only meant to prepare us for the eternal journey we will one day join.

Before us stands a whole world that needs that message. That job seems impossible, yet one more stone in our path. Then Jesus reminds us that we save the world, one person at a time. Part of that work is praying for those who don't know Jesus. We pray

**that they might be open to an invitation and we might be bold to invite. We partner with missionaries and groups who do the same for those far from us**

**We do it by Word and action. Our lives have to match the witness that Jesus has given us. We have new life in Christ. The old is gone the new has come. The stones of guilt that we might feel have been rolled away. Death no longer has its power; we are no longer its captive. The resurrection of Jesus proclaims that God has won the victory. Through Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit, God invites all to believe and participate with Him.**

**When people ask how you can be joyful in the midst of difficulties, point them to Jesus. Think about your faith story, how God has changed your life and be willing to share it. You see, that's what "SHARING CHRIST, CHANGING LIVES!" is all about. It is the transformation that God is accomplishing through our witness of Word and Sacrament, love and action to all those whom we meet.**

**It is the Holy Spirit who brings about transformation. We have no power to do that. We help make disciples by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and letting the Holy Spirit work through it. That's how disciples get made!**

**Here's your question: Will you share a transformation story with someone?**