

“Resurrection Sunday”

Series – Love Leads the Way, part 3

Mark 16:1-8

Happy Easter! I am so glad you are here this morning to celebrate the Resurrection. If you are here for the first time or are a guest from out of town, we especially want to welcome you. At Bellaire Community United Methodist Church we believe in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That is a pretty amazing purpose, and it should be, because we believe in a pretty amazing savior, the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Would you please join me in prayer? Holy Son of the Living God, Jesus Christ, we celebrate your Resurrection in a special way today. We rejoice that you died to save us and rose again, proving you are the Messiah. Thank you that you never leave us nor forsake us. Please guide us in this moment now. Open our ears, open our minds, and change our hearts. And we will give you all the glory, Lord Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever tried to move something impossibly heavy? Even though it is spring, I want to tell you about the biggest snowball I have ever rolled. I was at a college winter retreat at Lake Louise over in Boyne Falls. The weather was perfect – low thirties and lots of snow – so we decided to go hiking up Spirit Mountain. At the top of this steep, 400-foot climb, one of us had the great idea of rolling a snowball back down the hill, like you see in cartoons. So a dozen ambitious 18-to-20 year old guys starting rolling this snowball until it weighed a ton. I’m just glad it didn’t squash anyone! After several stops and starts down the hill, we finally rolled the snowball into a large tree, where it stuck. No matter how hard we strained, it was impossible to move any further.

You have probably moved some heavy objects before – furniture, cars, even boulders. But I’m guessing you had help, maybe some heavy machinery, ropes and pulleys. On the first Easter morning, Mary, Mary, and Salome had none of that. These three women were on their way to Jesus’ tomb, and they realized an impossible task confronted them: they needed someone to move a huge stone out of the way, so that they could get to Jesus’ body.

Clearly these women loved Jesus very much. They had stood near the cross as Jesus died. They had seen Joseph of Arimathea gather Jesus’ body and lay it in the tomb. They had watched as the stone was set in place – a 2-ton boulder which was rolled to the lowest point in front of the tomb entrance. While easy to install, removing it would have been next to impossible. The whole point was to keep animals and grave robbers out.

The women were on their way to do the final preparation of Jesus’ body. That might be hard for us to understand in our modern era of undertakers and morticians. Today we pay others to do what families did for centuries – prepare their loved ones for their final resting place. When Jesus died on Friday afternoon, just before sunset and the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath – there was almost no time to do the proper rites, since no work was allowed on Sabbath. The women had to wait until first light on Sunday to go to Jesus’ tomb.

In truth, the stone was really the least of these women’s problems. The worst part was how hopeless it all seemed. Jesus was dead. His tomb was blocked by a boulder and guarded by soldiers. The women realized the rock wasn’t going to move itself. They began to ask each other, “Who will remove the stone for us?” In my own paraphrase, they asked each other, “What in the world are we doing?”

Have you ever faced an impossible situation? Have you ever had a problem so unbearable, a burden so heavy, that you found yourself asking, “What am I doing?”

The stone doesn't have to be a huge, heavy boulder. Sometimes, it is the culmination of little things that gradually overwhelms us and leaves us desperate. Let me give you an illustration. My family and I went to Lake Michigan last week. On the beach were millions of beautiful stones perfect for skipping over the water. Now imagine someone had told us, we couldn't go home until the beach was cleaned up. Let me tell you, we threw stones until our arms were tired, and yet, when we were done, you couldn't even tell that we had been there. You couldn't even tell that we had picked up any stones. It was not humanly possible for us to clean up all the stones on the beach.

Think of all the things that weigh you down. Fights. Grief. Gossip. Trouble at work. Finances. Dysfunctional families. Guilt. Regret. Health issues. These things cause us stress and anxiety, and no matter how hard we try, we can't remove them. The Bible has a simple word for these things. Sin. Sin is too heavy to move, too impossible to fix on our own. We all have these stones weighing us down.

These women were also under a heavy burden. The death of Jesus had clearly shaken them. But the story goes on. When they arrived at the tomb, the women looked up – there is a double meaning here. They literally saw something amazing, and they directed their gaze to a higher power. What had happened? God had rolled the stone away. And what's more, Jesus had been raised back to life.

Frankly, this is impossible. Think of everything that Jesus experienced in the last hours of his life. His betrayal, arrest, and illegal trial. Peter’s denial. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and crucified. There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that he was dead.

I have done over two dozen funerals, and I have never witnessed a resurrection before. I know we have great medical knowledge these days, but let’s face it. It is not humanly possible for us to come back to life. Not by our own power. But Matthew 19:26 says, with God anything is possible. That includes resurrection.

The stone was rolled away, and there was a witness to tell the women why. A young man in white – an angel, confirmed the good news to the women. “I know who you are looking for: Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here. He is risen. He is alive. Look, his coffin is empty. Now, go tell the others. Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, the first place they met. He will see them again.”

The women heard these words and were astonished. They were bewildered. In fact, Mark 16:8 says that the women did not say anything to anyone. They had never experienced anything like this before. It probably took them some time to process it.

But of course, we know the women eventually did say something to the disciples. Today we know the whole story. The stone was rolled away. The impossible did happen. Jesus is alive. And he did appear to his disciples and many others.

I believe in the impossible. And I believe that God still rolls the stones away for us. The story of the gospel is that God created us for a loving relationship, but we broke that relationship with our sin. Romans 3:23 says that no one is

righteous before God. We have all messed up. In our selfishness, we have denied God's proper place at the center of our lives. Romans 6:23 tells us our sin causes death, spiritually and physically. We all need help. We all need forgiveness. We all need grace. We all need resurrection. We cannot remove the burden of sin ourselves.

But there is hope. Romans 5:8 says that God proves his love for us this way: while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. This is the grace God gives us. Through Jesus, our sin is forgiven, our stones are rolled away, and our lives are restored.

There is a simple way to receive the grace you need. Believe. Romans 10:9 tells us if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we are saved. That's it. We can't buy salvation. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. The righteousness of Jesus is ours if we simply believe. What a gift.

Has the resurrection changed your life? It has changed mine. I am utterly convinced that this story is true. Jesus really did rise from the dead. His resurrection changed the lives of his disciples, who in turn changed the world.

I have had my share of stones. Depression. Lack of purpose. Gossip. Mistakes. Guilt. Like a bag that I filled with stones, my sin was a burden so heavy I could not move. I failed to overcome sin on my own, and so at one point I decided to completely turn my life over to Jesus and let him roll the stones away. It was not easy, but it has been worth it.

You don't have to be a pastor to believe that Jesus died and rose again for you. You don't have to be some super-religious person with all the right answers to turn your life over to the one who loves you enough to die for you. What you

have to do is believe. Believe that the resurrection makes a difference. Believe that your life is worth something. Believe that the stones in your life can be overcome by the power of God Almighty. Trust him to redeem you from sin and death and give you eternal life.

For many people, this story sounds too good to be true. We may act like the women, confused, bewildered, amazed, and stunned into silence. But we cannot stay there. The resurrection leaves us all with a choice. If Jesus died to redeem our lives, what will we do next?

Let Jesus remove the stone of sin in your life. Let him into your heart. Live for him. And most importantly, share the good news with someone else who still struggles under heavy burdens.

The stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen. It is wonderfully impossible, maybe the craziest story ever told. And it is completely true.

Would you pray with me?

Memory verse

John 11:25

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."