



## "THE ROLLING STONES" – MARK 16:1-8

### *Resurrection Sunday*

*By: Reverend Corwin Malcolm Davis*

---

I have to be honest: Easter sermons are difficult for me this year. I know, I know, perhaps a preacher isn't supposed to say that. But it's the truth: Easter this year is difficult for me.

Easter is difficult for me in any given year because of the over-familiarity of the story. With each passing year, from Maundy Thursday to 7 Last Words to Resurrection Sunday, we all know how the story goes. We think we've heard every variation of "I thirst" or "Father, forgive them" and we sometimes tire of hearing the same "Eeaarrrrlllyyy on Sunday morning!"

I would offer, my sisters and brothers, that the story of the Resurrection has lost its splendor for some of us because of how the church has trivialized it. It is no longer a story of awe for some of us. This grand narrative of life coming from death, this majestic story of the powers of God over the powers of this world, the story of the Resurrection has been reduced by the church to a mere shout break or a way to close any sermon that lacks an actual close.

No longer consecrated. No longer sacrosanct. No longer holy.

But how could we give the Resurrection story sanctity and invest it with the meaning and power that it deserves if we do not even do that with our own everyday miracles? For is that not *also* the way we often treat even the sacrament of Holy Communion? This extraordinary means of grace becomes nothing for us but a trite monthly obligation or a performative expression of piety.

And this is why an Easter sermon is difficult for me even more so this year. In many ways, although we know the story, we know the ending, we know when the "shout" is coming, the story does not always resonate with us. For many of us, the familiar story still seems so *distant*.

How can we talk and preach and sing about the resurrection amid such violence and illness?

Where in the story of the millions of lives lost to a global pandemic is there space for resurrection?

With COVID numbers continuing to surge, with another Black body being gunned down by police officers, with a hate crime of a mass shooting against Asian-Americans in Atlanta and a grocery store mass shooting in Boulder, with the grief and loss of loved ones and cherished opportunities, with the strongholds of anxiety and depression, with financial cutbacks and restrictions, with isolation and distress – Where, O Lord, is a resurrection?

Some of us thought that we'd be back in the sanctuary by Easter 2020, and yet – an entire pandemic year later – we are still situated in the midst of illness and death, not physically able to gather together. And I can't help but wonder: "What troubles have we seen; what conflicts have we passed? Fightings without and fears within since we assembled last!"

And maybe this is just where we find ourselves in Easter 2021. Maybe we are surrounded by so much death, that we find it difficult to hope for a Resurrection. We are left to wonder, just as the women in today's text, "Who will move this stone for *us*?" The foreboding stones of anti-Blackness and violence, the stones of illness and loss, the stones of violence and death – who has the strength and the ability and the compassion to move these stones for us?

We enter today's reading after Jesus is taken before Pilate and asked if he is the King of the Jews, and Jesus offers no definitive response. And then Jesus is taken before the crowd alongside Barabbas, and the crowd chooses to save Barabbas and they chant "Crucify him!" toward Jesus. And so it is that Jesus is mocked and spit upon and stripped and whipped and was crucified.

And the Bible says that, from a distance, the women were looking on – specifically Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of Jesus. And Jesus is buried now in a borrowed tomb, and his body is wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid in the tomb, and the stone was rolled against the door of the tomb. And the Bible is clear in saying Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother saw where the body was laid.

And on the third day, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James come with spices to the tomb in order to anoint his body for burial. And they remark to each other while they're on their way to the tomb, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" *But* when they arrive to the tomb, they look up and see that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

We know how the story goes from here. Jesus, the same one that the women saw crucified, the same one that the women saw give up the ghost, the same one that scripture tells us the women saw where he was buried, has now resurrected – just as he said!

But I would offer to you today that the resurrection itself is not the only miracle in this story. Yes, I would offer that there are actually *two* miracles present in this story.

Although Jesus said back in the ninth chapter of Mark that "the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise" – the women did not come to the tomb preparing to see a resurrection, they were preparing to embalm a body. Again, the women did not come to the tomb thinking that life was going to be present, they were fully expecting death. And so the women wanted the stone to be moved for one reason – so that they could anoint a dead body.

But I invite you to consider this morning, my dear sisters and brothers, that there *is* the miracle of the resurrection, but there is *also* the miracle of the rolling stone. Despite the death that was all around them, despite the violence of the Greco-Roman government, despite the illnesses that

plagued the hearts of the crowds, the stone was moved not so they could embalm a body, but that they would see a resurrection.

In other words, it's not only that Jesus was resurrected, but that Jesus also *wanted* them to see it. See, Jesus would have been resurrected either way. We believe that the power of the Resurrection had nothing to do with the tomb or the stone – but that either way, Jesus had the power to get up. *But* the stone was rolled away. In all four gospels, it is mentioned that the stone was rolled away. In each story of the Resurrection, the writers want us to understand the significance of the rolling stones.

And in this second Easter in a pandemic, in this continuing season of violence and illness, in this season of depression and isolation and loss and grief, can I tell you some good news? Can I share with you how we might celebrate Easter this year?

The good news, my sisters and brothers, is not just that Jesus was resurrected – that was going to happen either way – but the good news is that the stone was rolled away so we could see it! The good news is that not only was Jesus resurrected, but that we were invited to be a part of the resurrection story.

The good news, as a friend shared with me, is that the resurrection was already done, but rolling the stone away, that was for us!

And aren't you glad this morning that we serve a God who rolled the stone away?  
And aren't you glad this morning that we serve a God who *still* rolls stones away?

We serve a God who rolls the stone away so we can *see* the resurrection.

We serve a God who moves fetters to our sight so that we can experience new life.

We serve a God who gives us clarity of mind and a spirit of discernment so we can even *know* a resurrection when we see one!

We serve a God who doesn't just bring joy out of sorrow, but a God who wants for the whole world to see it! – “And I, if I, be *lifted* up from the earth – I'll draw *all* people unto me!”

This is the good news today. Maybe there *are* miracles happening all around us, but we just have some stones in the way. Maybe there *is* life stemming out of death, but we just can't see it right now because we see through a glass dimly. But maybe, just maybe, when we look behind the stone, when we peek around the stone, we will realize that we are invited to see the resurrection, and that we are invited to participate in the resurrection, that we are invited to join with God in the work of redemption and that we are, indeed, a Resurrection people.

There *are* all these stones in the way. So many stones blocking our view of the world, so many stones blocking our view of the everyday miracles, so many stones blocking our view of the life that keeps springing forth out of death.

*But* there is another stone.

There's another stone that rolled down through forty-two generations.

There's another stone that rolled out of the belly of a virgin.

There's another stone that rolled out of Nazareth and into Judea and into Samaria.

There's another stone that rolled through bringing sight to blinded eyes and sound to deaf ears.

There's another stone that rolled up Calvary's mountain, and was rolled onto a wooden cross.

There's another stone that rolled through a borrowed tomb and through a weekend of death.

There *is* another stone today that death could not hold and the grave could not keep.

There *is* another stone today, a stone that some call the rock of our salvation.

There *is* another stone today, and it's the same stone that the builders rejected that has now become the chief cornerstone – this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Will you help me call him? For there is a stone that we call Jesus! And *this* stone could not be held down, could not be limited by another stone, but rather he got up. He got up! And He didn't rise empty handed, but he got up with all power in his hands. He got up and overcame sin, death, hell and the grave. Death has no sting and the grave has no victory, *He* has power!

And Paul says that the very same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is the same Spirit that lives in us. And because he got up, we can get up. We got getting up power inside of us! I believe today that we, too, have the power to bring life out of dead situations. I believe today that we, too, have the power to roll the stones out of our way that would prevent us from seeing God's glory. I believe today that we, too, are invited to participate in the power of resurrection.

*He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.  
He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.*

---

**The Reverend Corwin Malcolm Davis** is a Ph.D. student in Practical Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, as a George W. Woodruff Fellow and a Centennial Scholars Fellow. Rev. Davis is an ordained Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and serves as a consultant for the AME Publishing House.