

Easter Sunday - Our Saviors Lutheran Church- April 1st ,2018

Rolling the Stone Away

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is Risen - He is Risen Indeed

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Happy Easter. On behalf of the staff and leadership and the 1,000 members who call Our Savior's in beautiful downtown Neenah, "home", I wish you a Blessed Easter Day. This is a day filled with traditions, egg hunts, candy galore, brunches, family gatherings. I am told that Easter is second only to Halloween for candy sales in this nation. Dentists love this day.

But we have gathered to celebrate the oldest of all Easter traditions. I shared this cute story last night, so, if you were here you are going to hear it again. You can use it at one of the family meals you will have today.

You may have heard this cute story before but I couldn't resist sharing it again. A little boy and his mother, shopping for Easter candies and decorations, ran into their Pastor in the store. Mom and the Pastor exchanged a little chit-chat. Then the Pastor looked at little Johnny and asked, "So, what are you up to today?" "Oh," Johnny said, "We're getting ready for Easter!" Seeing a theological opportunity, the Pastor replied "Oh really? And just what exactly is Easter anyway? Do you know what happened on Easter?" Little Johnny looked at the Pastor a little offended. "Of course I know what Easter is. It's when Jesus went to Jerusalem, and he rode a donkey, and they waved palms at him." "That's right, go on" said the Pastor. "And he got in trouble and he was beat up and yelled at and then they nailed him on a cross and then he died." "Very good," said the Pastor. "What happens next?" "Well, then they put him in a tomb and they put a big rock in front of it. But three days later he got raised and got out of there." "Johnny, that's great!" said the Pastor, pleased to know that the Sunday school program worked so well. "But that's not all" said Johnny. "Oh, said the Pastor, what else?" "Well, the rock got rolled back, and Jesus stepped out, and he looked around, and if he sees his shadow there's six more weeks of winter."

Our Gospel story is a familiar one even though each Gospel writer tells a little different story. One account has Mary going to the tomb first and sees the stone

rolled away. She runs and tells a few disciples who do their own limited CSI investigation. They go back home probably to figure out what to do. Who stole the Body? Let's get a search team together. Mary stays at the tomb. She sees angels. They converse with her and in addition to that she has a conversation with Jesus who she believes at first is a gardener. Mary runs and tells the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." The disciples probably thought Mary was losing it. Or said "That's Impossible.", or "What are you smoking, Mary?"

Nobody was expecting a resurrection on that very first Easter Day. Among the tales that circulated around Jerusalem were - someone stole the body- He wasn't really dead on Friday - or the body was moved to a different tomb. This account has the women going to the tomb to prepare the body for burial. On the way, one big question is asked. Who will roll the stone away for us? Actually, all of the Gospel accounts have to do with the stone. The large heavy disk that was rolled into place to block the entrance of the tomb on Friday. In each version, the stone had already been rolled away. Rumors abounded. Earthquake? Grave robbers? Roman soldiers? Followers of Jesus? No - God moved the stone.

What about us? Who will move the stone for us? Or I should say the stones of our lives that we encounter. The stones that separate us from God. Sometimes we are on the opposite side of some boulder, a type of a barricade. We can't even see past it, get around it, or go through it. Who will move the stone for us?

Perhaps our stone is not believing in this miraculous story. We are like the Doubting Thomas which is our text for next week. Who will move that stone for us? Jesus already did! Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Maybe we are standing behind the stone of bitterness. Stuff has happened and life has dealt us a tremendous blow. And somewhere along the road you have concluded that God is punishing you for something you did or didn't do. Kind of funny. Someone said - God gets too much credit and too much blame for the stuff that happens in our world. Who will move this stone of bitterness from your life? Jesus has already done so!

Maybe it's the stone of a rocky past. Like John Newtown. Never heard of him? Well he was a slave trader. On his last slave trading trip, a storm threatened his ship and life. He cried out- "Lord have mercy on me". He became a minister and wrote these words.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see.

If your life is filled and cluttered with terrible deeds, who will move that stone? Jesus already has! Yes. You may be carrying the stone of pride, or the stone of fear, or the stone of hatred, or the stone of unforgiving, it doesn't matter what the stone is. Jesus has moved it. Actually because of this resurrection Jesus has blown it to bits.

So before you celebrate with friends and loved ones today, remember this - Jesus is alive. His victory over death has removed every barrier, every stone that stands in your way for a joyful life. Live this life with joy, laughter, and with love for others.

He is Risen- He is Risen Indeed
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Amen- Let it be so