

Mark 16:1-8

Very few stories in the Bible portray as much emotion as the story of Easter. Contained within these eight verses of St. Mark are four distinct human emotions. From the previous chapter we know that these three women went to the tomb of Jesus in sadness. Along the way they showed confusion. They had forgotten about the large stone guarding the opening. They would not be able to move it away; but then they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Entering the tomb the woman became very alarmed. An angel was sitting on the very spot where Jesus had been laid. He told them that Jesus had risen from the dead, but as they left to tell the disciples, Mark tells us that these women were very afraid. How's that for an Easter emotional roller-coaster ride? From sadness, to confusion, to alarm, to being afraid. Whatever happened to Easter joy? Rather than greeting others with "Happy Easter!" or "Blessed Easter!" these women may have muttered, "A confused Easter to you," or "A fearful Easter to you and yours."

We don't use expressions like that. We express Easter joy in greeting each other. We didn't come to church this morning with sad hearts. We weren't confused when we arrived. We didn't show alarm at what was being said and sung here today; and I don't think any of us will leave here being afraid. At least, that's how it looks on the outside. On the outside none of us resemble these three women, but on the inside I think perhaps we do.

The world does not pause on Easter Sunday to become happy and full of joy for a day. The Somalian Pirates are still holding their hostage and looking for more. The town of Binghamton, New York is still in shock over last weeks' massacre. The residents of Pittsburgh are still mourning the murders of three police officers. The stock market is still down and unemployment lines are still long. Whichever direction we turn in our world we see the three women with their Easter emotions--sadness, confusion, alarm, and fear. People are walking, not to the tomb of Jesus, but here and there through life, yet acting just like these three women. These women began their Sunday morning believing that Jesus was dead, and that is exactly the manner in which our world acts today. Not an attitude of "Happy Easter...Jesus lives!" but with attitudes of sadness, confusion, alarm, and fear.

And I think we fit somewhere in there too. On the outside we may be all smiles today, but we are living in this sad and confused world. The alarm and fear around us can quite easily find a home within us. On the inside we deal with sadness. Pain and suffering, loneliness and death are a part of our lives as well. On the inside we, quite honestly, may have a lot of confusion. We question why troubles come to us. We don't have answers. We don't see solutions to many of our problems. On the inside we are alarmed at all the murders and coldness around us. We are alarmed at the coldness we often see within ourselves. On the inside we are afraid; afraid of where our economy is heading; afraid that we are not in control of our future. And if we care to admit it, afraid of what God thinks of us; afraid because of our sinful living; afraid that we, like the three women, often act as if Jesus was more dead than alive.

On the way to the tomb these women had a huge problem...at least they thought they did. "The stone," they thought, "The stone is much too large for us to move! What will we do?" Is there such a stone in your life? A stone that is much too large for you to move? A problem that you simply cannot handle? Guilt that is overwhelming? Grief that does not ever go away? A temptation which always causes you to fall? Most people do not like to admit that such stones exist for them; that they are too weak to handle life's problems. But such stones are, in fact, very real; as real as the

stone those soldiers rolled into the opening of Jesus' tomb. And stones like this can create within us sadness and confusion, alarm and fear. I have such stones in my life; problems that are too difficult for me, and I know that you do too. You're human like I am. The stones are there, and we are not always able to move them.

Now bear with me for a few minutes here. I'm going to ask you to imagine something which should be very repulsive to you. How would your life be different if you believed Jesus was still dead? That's what these three women imagined as they walked toward the tomb. And yet they still walked. They still conversed with each other. Jesus, to them, was dead in His tomb. How would your life be different if this is what you believed?

Would you have bothered even coming here this morning? In fact, if you believed Jesus was dead, why would you ever come to church? You would still converse, as these three women did, but what would be the topic of your conversations with others? Only the things of this world--the problems in life. Why would you ever talk about, or even think about, your Savior, your hope of heaven, the joy of the resurrection? If you believed Jesus was dead, you would have none of these things--no Easter joy, no hope, no Savior, no faith. And isn't it true that if you believed Jesus was still behind the stone in His tomb, that your biggest problem would be the stone that, one day, would sit on your tomb? Because in the Judgment you and I would have to face God without a Savior, without a prayer, without any hope of living forever in heaven.

Okay, now you can stop imagining such things. Jesus is not dead...He lives! When the women arrived at the tomb, their huge problem was not a problem anymore; the stone had been rolled away. But it was not some earthquake that did this. It was the power of Jesus' resurrection. He burst the stone away from the opening. And so even though these women had been sad and confused; and even though they were alarmed and afraid, when Jesus' resurrection sank in and really laid hold of their hearts, they were changed. The Holy Spirit, the other Gospel writers indicate, gave these women Easter joy, and this made a difference in their lives. Believing in a living Lord, they didn't worry anymore about stones that were too large for them to move.

And isn't this true also for you? Wherever you look in your life, whatever large stone you see there, when you arrive at the empty tomb of Jesus, your stone is rolled away. If Jesus was dead, you would truly have a problem too overwhelming for you. But He isn't dead...Jesus is alive, and He lives for you! And so no stone can keep you sad and confused, alarmed and afraid. If you have guilt over horrible sins you have committed, look again...that stone is gone. Because Jesus died and rose again, your sins are forgiven--all of them. Your guilt was carried by your Lord. He was punished for you. You may imagine that a large stone of sin and guilt is weighing heavy upon your heart, but the reality is that the stone has been rolled away by Jesus.

If you have problems which are like heavy stones in your life, look again...Jesus has rolled those stones away. He lives His life in you. You are His baptized Christian. No problem is too great for Him to handle. We may think, as the women did, that these large stones are a huge problem; but Jesus' resurrection changes everything. In Christ, His life, His love, His strength is yours. Coming to the empty tomb we see, as the women did, that our problems are not huge problems anymore.

And if there is a heavy stone of grief upon your heart; if, on this Easter morning, you are missing dear ones, loved ones who died in Christ, and now their place in your life is filled with emptiness...come closer to the empty tomb and see what the women saw--that stone, too, is gone!

Jesus' resurrection replaces your grief with hope. You will spend eternity with your dear ones in heaven, and all because Jesus died and rose again for you.

Now all of this may make no difference to the modern-day pirates off the coast of Somalia. It may make no difference to men who are intent on murdering and stealing this week. It may make no difference to those in the world who do not care that today is Easter. But to you it makes a difference in your life. Isn't that why you're here? Isn't that why you receive the Holy Supper with joy? Isn't that why, amid the sadness, and confusion, and fear in our world, you live with hope; you live your faith in Christ--because you believe that you have a living Savior who forgives you day after day, and who gives you a place with Him in heaven on the Last Day?

And friend, whenever in your life you feel a heavy stone weighing down upon you; whenever sadness and confusion comes into your life; whenever you become alarmed or afraid--because those days come to all of us--then come closer to the empty tomb. Come closer and see what those women saw. The stone is no longer there! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.