

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan

“ROLLING STONES”

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 31:1-6;

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;

Acts 10:34-43;

John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

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People of God:

CHRIST IS RISEN!!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!!

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We are Protestants. We are Presbyterians.

We don't talk about Mary much, especially at Easter.

While she is venerated by our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, Mary has gotten a bit of a rough ride over the years.

Today, I invite you to consider Mary and her role in the Resurrection stories.

I am sharing the thoughts of some other colleagues about Mary, followed by a story from my own life.

Blessings,

Rev. Mark

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Mary on Easter Morning: A Monologue (inspired by John 20: 1-18) ~ written by Carol Penner.

We were weighed down, walking to the tomb.

We knew the way, for we had walked it two days before.

We had followed Joseph of Arimathea and his servant, down the hill from Golgatha, their arms straining with the dead weight of Jesus' body.

We saw where they laid him, how they wrapped him in linen.

We saw their shoulders pushing that stone in place, the sound of it grinding shut.

And though our eyes streamed tears, we marked the place, for we knew we would come back.

And on the first day of the week, we came, arms full of aromatic oil and spices; cinnamon, cassia, myrrh.

All our resources pooled in a fragrant offering, one last service for Jesus.

We walked the dark path, the sky just beginning to lighten.

What we saw in the semi-darkness was not the closed tomb we had expected, but a gaping hole!

Alarmed, we looked inside, seeing that Jesus' body was gone.

Someone had been there before us.

How could this be?
Grave robbers?
Some final act of blasphemy against our Saviour?
Had Pilate changed his mind, and was Jesus' corpse now hanging somewhere for all to see?

I dropped all I was carrying and ran to find the disciples.
Peter and John came racing back, entering the tomb:
Jesus was not there.
I stood with them, our hands on the giant stone, confusion written on our faces.

They left, but I remained, gathering up all those spices, my tears dropping on the ground, would this suffering never end?

I turned and looked again in the tomb, but this time, there was not darkness, but light!
Two angels sitting where Jesus' body should be; and they asked me why I was weeping!
Why was I weeping?

And then another man, the gardener, suddenly there behind me, also asking about my tears.

All I wanted was Jesus' body, so I could do what I came here for, mourn properly, anoint him with these spices in my arms.

"Where is Jesus, tell me if you know!" I cried.

And then he said my name, and I suddenly recognized him.

Jesus! Not dead, not cold, not lifeless, not gone forever!

Jesus, alive, before me, talking, looking in my eyes!

My heart about stopped as I reached out to hold him, to see if he was real, touchable, Jesus in the flesh.

He talked of My God and Your God, and suddenly it was real to me.

It was not God far away, not God not listening, but God present, God doing impossible things, God making morning miracles out of death's darkness.

Jesus asked me to go and tell the others.

I threw the spices on the ground, (no need of them now!) and I started running,
my feet moving faster than they've ever moved.
Beautiful with good news,

I have seen the Lord!

I have seen the Lord!

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Roll Back the Stone: A Litany for Easter ~ written by Janet Morley.

When we are all despairing, when the world is full of grief,
when we see no way ahead and hope has gone away:

Roll back the stone.

Although we fear change, although we are not ready,
although we'd rather weep and run away:

Roll back the stone.

Because we're coming with the women, because we hope where hope is vain,
because you call us from the grave and show the way:

Roll back the stone.

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what if the homeless are right, that affordable housing for everyone is a possibility and not a problem;

what if the poor are telling the truth, that we silence their voices, stepping right past them as if they were invisible, in our rush to be their advocate;

what if the broken and the sick are correct, that they should be able to receive the medical care we do;

what if the testimony of the women is true, that the grave is empty and the Gardener is planting new life for every one, every one, every one.

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When I served in Thunder Bay, Susan and I saw a local production of the musical "NUNSENSE", which was quite popular and had a good run "Off-Broadway" in the '90s.

The story revolves around The Little Sisters of Hoboken – a group of nuns serving in New Jersey.

A friend, an elder from First Church, Thunder Bay, was in the production.

She played Sister Robert Anne, a streetwise nun from Brooklyn, who was in a constant battle with the very strict and strident Mother Superior.

The play was awesome, but the line I remember was spoken by our friend Lynae.

She was in a scene, listening to Mother Superior and the other nuns, standing around lamenting their situation.

Sister Robert Anne finally had enough and she said: "**Oh sisters, roll the stone away and live!**"

Isn't that the reason for this day?

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, MESSIAH-SAVIOUR AND HOLY SPIRIT... AMEN.

CHRIST IS RISEN!!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!!

John 20: 1-18

"In the first creation story God drove Eve and Adam out of the garden. But in this new creation Jesus sends Mary out of the garden rejoicing."

"From despair to bewilderment, from fear to faith, from sadness to joy. What an Easter journey."

PRAYER OF APPROACH

When the day is quiet and the world still sleeps and the morning is crisp and love breathes again, we praise you, O God of resurrection.

When the time is now and the moment is on us and the place is here and the grave clothes are folded, we praise you, O God of renewal.

When the day is new and the sun is fresh and the light is clean and the stone has rolled, we praise you, O God of empty tombs.

Now we see the world differently.

What we thought was the way of things yesterday is no longer the way of things today
death was yesterday new life is today
tombs were sealed now they are open
love was dead now is alive again
death has been given a make-over endings have a new perspective
things work differently now.

When the shouting has stopped and the suffering ended and the betrayal complete and the darkness stolen then we praise you, O God of life.

God of mystery, we confess that faith doesn't come easy every Easter.

When we face loss in our own lives, we sometimes lose track of the promise in Christ's resurrection. Sorrow can weigh us down.

Our challenges can feel like a stone too heavy to roll away.

Forgive us, O God, and let the joy of this day assure us that the power of your love will never let us go. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Do not dwell on your wounds any longer

for he has risen to heal you,

he has risen to forgive you;

he has risen to change us all and bind us together now.

Christ has risen to forgive us. **Thanks be to God. AMEN.**

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of power and possibility, you broke open the tomb that held our Lord.

Now break into your church where your people are distracted by old quarrels, meaningless diversions, or unhelpful divisions about mission and service.

Resurrect, renew and revive your church!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

God of resurrection and new life, you broke into the hearts of Jesus' fearful friends. Now break into our relationships with one another. Where they are vibrant and life-giving, nurture them. Where they are strained by old hurts and misunderstandings, or carelessly taken for granted.

Resurrect, renew and revive our life together!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

God of might and mercy, you broke the schemes of those who stood in the way of your love. Now break into the governance of your world. Stir the minds and hearts of leaders to work for justice and equitable sharing. Where laws are corrupt, or people suffer under harsh rule.

Resurrect, renew and revive the leaders of the world!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

God of healing and hope, you broke the bonds of death which tried to shackle new life. Now break into situations of illness, pain, grief, and loss. Wherever people are sick in body, mind, or spirit, and wherever someone mourns the loss of any relationship or dream.

Resurrect, renew and revive our lives!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

God of Easter Renewal and Resurrection, you have broken into our lives again this day. Break into all our moments of celebration and joy. Give us gratitude, the impulse to share, and a spirit of grace and understanding.

Resurrect, renew and revive our souls and spirits!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

And break into the circumstances, places, and lives we name in the silence of our hearts...

- Those who are sick, suffering and dying – and their loved ones
- All medical professionals, municipal staff, truckers, food industry workers, caregivers
- Politicians, business leaders, community leaders, activists
- People of Italy, the United States, Spain,
- Syria, Yemen, the Congo, the Middle East, Canada, Ontario, Oxford County.

Resurrect, renew and revive your people!

God, in your mercy. **All: Hear our prayer.**

Now we pray in one voice the words that Jesus gave us:

The Lord's Prayer... Amen.

BENEDICTION

The Lord who conquered darkness with light,
give peace to you.

The Lord who conquered death with life,
give peace to you.

The Lord who conquered loneliness with love,
give peace to you.

AMEN.

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