

**Message for Easter Sunday**  
**Sunday, April 21, 2019**  
**North East United Methodist Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

READ **John 20:1-18**  
PRAYER

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Why did the angel move the stone? For whom did he roll away the stone? For Jesus? Did the stone have to be removed for Jesus to exit? Was the one who conquered death so weak that he couldn't push away a rock?

Max Lucado writes, *“The God who spoke still speaks. The God who forgives still forgives. The God who came still comes. He comes into your world...He comes to do what you can't...He comes to move the stones you cannot budge...”*

God is ready to move the stone that separates you from Him today. God moved that first stone on Easter Sunday two thousand years ago, to show us that through Jesus Christ, God could and would move many more.

The Bible says, *“God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Therefore, Jesus bore our sins on the cross...



...He took our place and served the punishment so that when the day came when we stand before God we will not have to meet with failure. God's Word tells us, *“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment”* (Romans 5:6; 5:9).

Through Christ, God created the opportunity for us to have the stone that has buried us, held us in, cut us off from the light, from God...God has given us the opportunity to have our sin rolled away...

Jesus gave us this wonderful gift and all we have to do is accept it. We do nothing to deserve it or earn it. We simply accept the love Christ showed us and the forgiveness He offers. Then God begins to transform our lives. Romans 10: 9-10 reads, ***“For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.”***

I often share the story of Lee Strobel, Investigative Reporter for the Chicago Tribune, who as an atheist set out to disprove the resurrection. After years of research, this was his conclusion. Strobel wrote, *“One final fact – described by a respected philosopher named J.P. Moreland – clinched the case for me.”*

*“When Jesus was crucified,” Moreland told me, “his followers were discouraged and depressed. So they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks. Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, regathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message – that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them.”*

*“And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways. For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead.”*

Strobel writes, *“The disciples...*



*...were in the unique position to know for a fact whether Jesus had returned from the dead. They saw him, they touched him, they ate with him. They knew he wasn't a hallucination or a legend. And knowing the truth, they were willing to die for him. That insight stunned me. The disciples didn't merely believe in the resurrection; they knew whether it was fact or fiction. Had they known it was a lie, they would never have been willing to sacrifice their lives for it. Nobody willingly dies for something they know is false. They proclaimed the resurrection to their deaths for one reason alone: they knew it was true.”*

Strobel's conclusion after over a year of research: ***“Combined with the other evidence for Jesus I had gathered, I concluded that he really is the one and only Son of God, who proved it by rising from the dead.”***

God moved a stone...a stone of doubt, skepticism...a stone that stood in front of Lee Strobel's heart...that kept him from seeing the truth...opening his heart to the One who opened the tomb that first Easter...

And once Strobel saw the truth...he confessed his sin...his shortcomings...his selfishness...he simply asked God to forgive him and chose to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be...the scriptures tell us that at that moment God removed the stone of sin from his life *“as far as the east is from the west”* (Psalm 103:12). And with that stone removed, he began a relationship with his Creator that will last forever...

God is ready, this day, this Easter Morning, to roll away the stone...



...of doubt from your heart...let God roll it away and replace it with faith...

The stones of doubt and skepticism that stand in the way of us having our sins forgiven and entering into a relationship with God are not the only stones God is prepared to remove...God will do whatever it takes to have a relationship with you...In fact, *“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...”*

What about stones of fear?



Are you afraid if you get close to Christ, you will have to face your sin, your past, your guilt? Luke 5:8, Peter comes face to face with Jesus for the first time, falls to his knees, and cries out, *“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”* Yes, in the light of Jesus the things we have hid in the darkness become visible and we have to deal with them.

Many of us would much rather forget our shortcomings, but not facing them gives them control over us...they begin to eat away at us like a cancer...it is only by bringing them into the light of Christ that we can be freed from their hold on us. God can move stones of fear.

...Stones of pride...



...Luke 18:10...Jesus tells the story of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector...a Pharisee or priest, stood by himself and prayed: *“God I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”* On the other hand, the tax collector *“stood at a distance...would not even look up to heaven...beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”* Jesus says, *“I tell you that this man, rather than the other...the tax collector rather than the priest, went home justified before God...”* The tax collector did not allow pride to get in the way of his relationship with God...he saw himself as he was...a sinner, lost, in need of God. God can move stones of pride.

What about stones of shame?



...John 8: 1-11, tells of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus spoke to the crowd about to stone her and said, *“Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone.”* The crowd dispersed and Jesus forgave this woman her sin. Throughout the Bible God forgives. There is nothing you could have ever done that God cannot forgive. God forgave David for adultery and murder; God forgave Solomon for idolatry, God forgave Peter for denying Jesus, God forgave Paul for murdering Christians, God forgave Zacchaeus for cheating his people, God forgave. Get up...leave your shame at the cross for that is where Jesus took care of it with His death. I carried the shame for things I had done...people I had hurt...for years...but no more...God can move stones of shame.

Choose to believe...to accept God's gifts and then trust and watch as God begins to roll away each day the NEXT stone that tumbles into your life...



...The NEXT stone, yes...

I remember coming home one day from seminary...walking in the door...and my wife, Debbie, sitting me down on the couch...she could barely get the words out..."Your dad had a heart attack...He didn't make it..." Fifty-seven years old...the night before I had visited with him, joked, hugged, talked, laughed; the next day he was gone. He was my best friend. For over a year, I fell into a deep depression and refused to be helped. Each day I did only what I needed to in order to survive and no more. In my time of depression, I made bad decisions, became very selfish, and escaped daily with sleep.

My depression and grief began to affect my work, my relationship with my supervisor, and my relationship with my wife. It was then I was called into the District Superintendent's office. I was embarrassed; I felt like I had failed. They asked me to get counseling, to be evaluated. I felt even more like a failure.

I prayed to God to take the whole situation away. And God spoke to me...through the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Isaiah. It reads, "***I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore your judges as in days of old...Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.***"

"*I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.*" The Word could have just as easily read, "I will roll away the stone...I will remove the rock that has trapped you in darkness."

I went to grief counseling and was also diagnosed and treated for depression. God removed a stone allowing me to grow closer to God, feel my calling more strongly, grow closer to my wife, and to be at peace with my dad's death.

God continues to remove stones in my life...





...financial difficulties that often overwhelm me...my struggle at times with criticism, taking it personally or internalizing it...the stone of fear as I look into the future and attempt to lead God's church...the stone of self-centeredness as God continues to challenge me to focus on others and on Him...the stone of grief as I said goodbye to my mom a few years ago...and the many stones that tried to bury my wife and I as she fought through breast cancer...

Jesus declared ***“The Spirit of THE LORD is upon me, and because of this he has anointed me to preach The Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal broken hearts and to proclaim liberty to captives, vision to the blind, and to restore the crushed with forgiveness.”***

Grief...sickness...A lost job...a broken marriage...a rebellious child...a disturbing addiction...loneliness...depression...financial stress...a lack of purpose...

All stones that bury us, entomb us, box us in, keep us from experiencing the peace of God...keep us from a deeper relationship with God and with one another...All stones that at times overwhelm us...all pebbles to God...

What stone...



...is God ready to roll away that the light may come in, that the Son may shine more brightly into your world? That you may experience what only God can bring...new life...resurrection?

God wants a relationship with you...God wants nothing to stand in the way...

There are many stones that have been rolled over our hearts just as the stone was rolled in front of the tomb that day two thousand years ago. The difference is that then the stone was rolled in front of the tomb to keep Jesus' body in...the stones rolled over our hearts keep God and others out...keeping you from the *“abundant life”* God promises.

As Max Lucado writes, ***“God comes to move the stones you can’t budge. Stones are no match for God. Not then and not now. He still moves stones.”***

Don’t think for a moment that the stones, the rocks, in your life are immovable...Don’t believe for a moment that the darkness cannot be removed...hurt healed...doubts dissolved...sins forgiven...marriage restored...relationships renewed...purpose discovered...It may be a time in your life that you feel like the disciples on that Friday...on the day Christ was crucified...you feel lost, confused, bewildered, even ashamed...it may feel like Friday...but listen...in the midst of your Fridays...in the midst of doubt and hurt and all that life throws at you...stop for a moment, pause, perhaps even kneel...listen and open your hearts to God’s mighty whisper...

*It's Friday, Jesus was nailed dead on a cross. ...but Sunday's Coming*

*It's Friday, Mary's crying her eyes out cause her baby Jesus is dead....but Sunday's Coming*

*It's Friday, the disciples are running in every direction like sheep without a shepherd. ...but Sunday's Coming*

*It's Friday, Pilate’s strutting around washing his hands 'cause he thinks he's got all the power and the victory....but Sunday's Coming*

*Its Friday People are saying, "As things have been, so they shall always be. You can't change anything in this world",...but Sunday's Coming*

*It's Friday, Satan's doing a little jig saying, "I control the whole world"...but Sunday's Coming*

*It's Friday, The temple veil ripped from top to bottom-the earth shook-the rocks split and tombs opened. The centurion screamed in fear: "Truly he was the Son of God!" ...Sunday's Coming*

*It's Sunday- The angel like dazzling lightening, rolled the stone away, exclaiming, "He is not here! He is risen!*

*It's Sunday-It's Sunday-It's Sunday*

