

April 12, 2009
Riverside Covenant Church
Daniel S. Teefey
Mark 16:1-8 (pg. 722) – Big Rocks

Have you ever seen the World's Strongest Man competitions on TV? Basically, these ridiculously large men are competing to perform unbelievable feats of strength. They grunt and yell trying to muster enough muscle to move whatever object is in front of them. The other night I was watching one of these events and the guys were rolling rocks of various sizes about 15 feet. The first rocks they rolled were pretty small, relatively, but each rock got bigger and heavier. Well as they got to the end of the row of rocks, neither of the guys competing could budge the largest one. They were pushing up against it with all of their might, but no matter what they did the rock did not budge. It actually got funny after a couple of seconds, watching these two gigantic men bouncing off this immovable rock like rag dolls. They could not move it . . .

This morning we just read a story about some women who had just watched a guy named Jesus, who they trusted and followed, die on a cross. Jesus died late in the day on a Friday and since they were losing daylight and Saturday was the Sabbath, a friend of Jesus', Joseph of Arimathea, just wrapped his body in a linen cloth and put it inside a cave so that his body could be properly prepared later after the Sabbath. An enormous stone was rolled in front of the cave. Some scholars say that it could have taken up to 20 men to roll the stone in front of the cave it was so large. No matter how many guys it actually took, this was an enormous stone.

And so here is this tomb, a cave with a giant stone in front of it and in our story we hear about a few women who are finally going to anoint Jesus' body for a proper burial. First thing in the morning, they get up, grab their oils and spices, and head for Jesus' tomb. **And on the way**, they start thinking and say. . . um, I never thought about this . . . but how are we going to roll that ridiculously large stone away from the entrance to the tomb?

That would have been a pretty good thing to think about a tad earlier. Maybe they could have rounded up all the disciples and any other strong men they found and had them come with them . . . but nope, in this story we have 3 women who haven't a clue how they are going to move this big rock to get to Jesus' body.

About a month ago Dana and I bought Adelaide her first real bed and the bed we bought is a bunk bed that has a twin bed on top and full bed on the bottom so that eventually we could have Miriam sleep on top or have friends over or we could take it apart and have them each have their own bed. The bed came in a whole bunch of small boxes, so we load the boxes into the van and bring it home and unload the boxes into Adelaide's room. Well I had a wedding that weekend, so Dana and the girls decided to go to Dana's parents' house for the weekend. On Friday night when I got home from the wedding rehearsal dinner I decided I was going to put the bed together. So I constructed the full bed and I constructed the twin bed and then the instructions said to lift up the twin bed and put it on top of the full bed and it had this cute little clip art picture of the 3 guys who were supposed to help me lift the twin bed and match the four posts on the bed with 4 giant pegs sticking out of the posts on the full bed. . . . here I had spent 2 hours putting this thing together and never thought about the fact that there was no way I was going to be able to pick up a twin bed by myself and set it on these 4 pins in the full bed below . . . don't think I didn't try . . . it was 2 in the morning and I was standing in Adelaide's bedroom balancing a twin bed on my head . . . if the sermon didn't make sense that weekend . . . now you know why.

The three women in our story are faced with an impossible task for them. Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb? The two Mary's and Salome sure are not.

I think we read this and say, **well that was sure stupid.** But anyone that has ever experienced the death of a loved one knows that in the days following their death, you are doing good to take things one hour at a time. And that's what these women are doing. Their teacher, their master, their Lord had just died a horrible death before their eyes . . . all their hopes, their dreams, their expectations were put in that cave and sealed with a large stone. And now they were just doing their best to take things moment by moment.

But as the women are walking towards Jesus' tomb **they come within sight of the cave and they look up** from their discussion to see that the stone, which was very large, Mark adds again, had been rolled away. They head towards the cave and enter it and sitting in the cave is an angel that says, **"He has risen! He is not here."**

That is our Good news! The stone has been rolled away and Jesus is gone.

What would you think their reaction would have been to that news. Easter in our time is clearly one of celebration and rejoicing and the high point of the Christian year, but their reaction to the moved stone and the empty tomb was not exactly overwhelming. Our passage says they were “alarmed” and trembling and bewildered and they were so afraid they initially said nothing to anyone.

Mary, Mary and Salome knew Jesus. **They knew he was a wonderful teacher**, they knew he was a great healer and a miracle worker and that he did and said things that they had never seen and heard before. They knew he was the son of God, but none of this had prepared them for what they now found. They thought they knew God, but this was a whole new level.

Their God was the mover of big rocks. Their God was not just a good guy, not just doer of good things . . . he was a big rock mover . . . ***the doer of impossible things.***

The story we tell on Easter is not just a story . . . it is not a story that we just hear and then go back home and act like nothing is different. This is a story of impossible things. **If I told you today that I could fly,** you would immediately start talking amongst yourselves about how crazy I was . . . perhaps you already do that. But if as I stood up here and told you I could fly, I began to float up into the air and hover above you floating around the room (I tried to get Malcolm to pull this off for me), you would begin to think a little something odd was happening. And you would probably study me very closely looking for cables or some other apparatus that was holding me up. But then if I floated right out the door and I began flying around outside above the parking lot, you would quickly start to realize that something impossible was happening before your eyes and it would change how you viewed me and the world. You would not forget it. You would never look at me in the same way again.

What these women found at the tomb 2000 years ago was impossible and life changing. The enormous stone that had seemed like such an obstacle was rolled away. The impenetrable barrier that they expected to find separating them from Jesus was gone . . . And the man they expected to find in the tomb was no longer there, but instead an angel telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a great event. Nearly everyone recognizes it in one way or another. Yesterday, my brother and his wife came over with my nephew and my mom is here too. And we spent some time yesterday filling our yard with eggs of all colors and watching as the kids went and found them

all. We all know Easter and if I went around the sanctuary here and asked what happened at Easter, you all would say that Jesus Christ came back from the dead.

What a nice piece of information that is!

But the reality is that **for some of you this is the one of the only times all year that you come to church.** And for others of you, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead is just some nice information that you catalog in your brain with your address, phone number and where you work. It is just another piece of data without much significance to you.

Raise your hand if you have known someone that has died. Raise your hand if you know someone that has been buried. O.K., now raise your hand if you have known someone that died, was buried, and then came back to life.

You see there are different types of facts in our world. There are facts that when we hear them they are beneficial, but they don't necessarily force us to do anything with them. I can tell you that there is a woman downstairs and she is my wife and her name is Dana and that we have a couple girls, Adelaide and Miriam . . . and all that might be very interesting to you and may be beneficial information, but it is not likely going to change your life.

Well there is another type of **information that forces us to have some sort of response.** When your boss walks into your office and tells you that the company has to make some layoffs, then that is more than just information . . . it requires some response. You have to find a new job or cut your expenses.

Or if you learn that a loved one has died . . . that is not just information . . . that compels a response, perhaps it is grief, perhaps it is a need to make arrangements . . . but you do not simply hear it and say thanks . . . and move on.

The news that we celebrate today is not just a random piece of information. When we hear that a man was born, walked around and performed miracles that not only healed people, but also demonstrated a command over all of nature . . . that he taught with an authority that no one had seen before, that he claimed that he and God were one . . . and that one day 2000 years ago crowds of people watched as he

was nailed to a cross and they watched as he breathed his last breath on that cross. His close friends took down his body and they laid it into a tomb . . .

When we hear the news that he then 3 days later came back to life . . . we can't simply say, "well that is some nice information . . . what are we having for dinner after church."

Information like that compels, demands a response from us.

When that same guy that rose from the dead said things like, "**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**" (John 10:10) and "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.**" (John 11:25) . . . we cannot simply be neutral.

A famous Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote once that you cannot be neutral towards Jesus. He is either a liar, a lunatic or your Lord . . . but he can't just be a good guy.

Either Jesus knew he was not God and just went around acting like God and telling everyone that he was God and was thus a liar. Or Jesus really thought he was God and thus was not technically lying, but was a crazy lunatic. Or he really was God. And if he really was God . . . God come to earth, then we should probably care what he said and did.

Your life is the next chapter in this Easter story that we read this morning . . . your response is the next part.

You do not exist at random. You . . . do not exist for no reason. You were created and chosen to be right here, right now by the creator of the universe. You were created to be in relationship with God, to hear about Jesus Christ, and to be a part of His story.

Dana and I had this baby stroller that we got when Adelaide was born and after our first walk one of the wheels broke because the little pin that held it on fell out and was lost and so I spent the next six months using various random objects to fill this pin hole trying to keep the wheel on. I put sticks in the hole and nails and screws and to some extent they all got the job done for a while, but they never replaced the pin that was designed to hold the wheel on . . . and thank goodness that Adelaide was buckled in to the

stroller seat, because some times the wheel would fall off and the stroller would plan in the ground . . . but no matter how hard we tried we could not find anything as good as the pin that was created to hold that wheel on.

When we were created by God, we were created to be in relationship with Him . . . **an early Christian used to say that we were all created with a God-shaped hole in us** . . . and you and I go through our lives sticking everything we can find in that hole. We place our families, or our jobs, or money or success or whatever else that we believe will be satisfying in that hole . . . and while some of those things get the job done, we know deep down inside that it is just a matter of time before the wheel falls off. We still have this sense that our life is not all that it could be . . . that there is something significant missing.

The Bible says that our sins separate us from God. And that as we sin . . . as we fill our God shaped holes with more and more junk . . . selfishness, pride, drugs, alcohol, hate, greed and so on . . . the farther and farther we find ourselves from God.

And the Bible says that that separation from the God that creates life means death. If God is here and life is here . . . and we keep saying, “more this and more this (walking farther and farther from God)” well then we don’t have life. And no life means death.

But Easter changes all this. Easter is about a God who was not satisfied watching as people drifted away from Him . . . This God said I am going to go and get them back. And so God came to us as a human, Jesus. And Jesus came after us . . . and Jesus piled all that crap that we had used to separate ourselves from God on his back and he carried it . . . and he died the death we were destined for on our behalf . . . because he loved us so dearly . . . and then he defeated it.

The Easter message is about God moving big rocks not just from the mouth of the tomb so that the women could get in. Not just so Jesus could get out. But so you too can be with God. **This is Tom’s story. This is your story too.**

You have big rocks in your life that seem like impossible barriers. Some of you this morning are facing divorce, some of you are facing lost jobs, some of you are fighting addictions, some of you are obsessed with your work and success . . .

When the women went to Jesus' tomb in our passage this morning, they had no idea what they were going to do about the big rock in front of them. But they went anyway. God is in the business of taking small steps, uncertain steps, but steps towards him . . . and crushing the barriers in between. God is a big rock mover.

When everyone else in the world was living sinful lives, God gave Noah and his family a way out
When **Abraham and Sarah** believed they could never have children, God gave them generations of descendants

When **Joseph's brothers** sold him into slavery, God made him the Pharaoh of Egypt's chief advisor

When the Israelites were **enslaved in Egypt for 400 years**, God freed them

When the Israelites were **trapped between the Egyptians and the red sea**, God parted it so they could cross

When the Israelites **wandered in the desert for 40 years**, God provided food for them

When the Israelites were **facing an intimidating Philistine enemy**, God used a young David and a slingshot to defeat them

When **Daniel is thrown into a lion's den** because he loved God, God kept him safe

And **Jesus turns water into wine**, gives sight to the blind, makes the paralyzed walk, feeds thousands of people on a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, calms storms and brings the dead back to life!

And **Jesus helps prostitutes find new life** and murderers become his greatest evangelists and time and time and time again . . . our God takes big rocks . . . things that stand before human beings and cause them to think they have no chance . . . and he throws those rocks aside and simply says . . . "**I am God**" . . .

I hope that you have wonderful time with your families today . . . I hope that you enjoy this Easter . . . but more than all that I hope that you know that in this very moment . . . the same God that has worked throughout the history of the world to cast aside obstacles that seem too big to us . . . is trying to change your life in West Lafayette, Indiana right now.

He loves you. Not later when you get everything in your life fixed up. No, God loves you right now! He knows that you are not perfect, he knows that you have a lot of secrets that you have not told anyone . . . he knows all that and still loves you. You are valuable to him.

When you leave this morning you have a choice. You can go back to your life as usual, maintain the status quo, chalk up this as another experience with a little more information to add to the brain . . . or you can say, this morning, April 12, 2009 . . . my life changes . . . I am committing or recommitting my life to Jesus Christ. I know that I am not all I was created to be, I know that I do things that God would not want me to do, but I also know that God loves me and that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead so that I could be in relationship with God again . . . and I know that God wants me to let him move big rocks out of my path . . . I will be back next Sunday and the following Sunday, and I will begin to read more of God's story in the Bible, and I will memorize scripture and I will ask others to hold me accountable . . . I will let God mold me into a new creation.

You have a choice! There is no doubt that there are big rocks in front of you. You can look at them and say they are too big and turn around and go home to life as usual. You can throw your body up against them over and over again, bruising and hurting because they won't budge. Or you can trust and watch the God who knows every hair on your head . . . push the rocks aside, reach out His hands and says, **"come, follow me."** It's your call.

One of the most powerful images of God's saving love for us is the story of the prodigal son. You have likely heard it, but the son goes to his father and asks for his inheritance early and he gets it and runs off and squanders it all, spending it on frivolous living and before long he has spent every last penny of it. It is all gone and the Bible says that the son becomes so desperate that he is living with pigs. One day, at rock bottom, he returns home to his father fully expecting to be rebuked, but his father does not scold him or ridicule him or shun him, but opens up his arms, embraces him and then throws a party that he has returned.

God could care less what your past looks like. He could care less what sins you have committed or what things you have committed. You are loved and if you will return to the one who created you, you will be received with open arms and God will rejoice. And you will walk into tomorrow and the rest of your lives with a companion that will never leave you or forsake you. Everything will not be perfect or fine or even

easy . . . but you will never be alone . . . and when your life comes to an end . . . you will be by God's side forever.

You don't have to throw yourself at life's obstacles any longer . . . you can simply say to God today . . . I give up, I know I can't do this . . . I know I keep falling short . . . I know I can't, but God I believe you can. I believe that Jesus Christ came for me and that on that cross he died with all my shortcomings, all my sins, all my failures . . . and 3 days later when he rose from the dead he defeated it all. And today I will follow the great rock mover . . . I will be his follower this afternoon and tomorrow and next week and every day of my life.

References consulted:

Hooker, Morna. The Gospel According to Mark. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991.
Lane, William L. The Gospel of Mark. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.