

I. My Notes ... WWC Message 4/4 (Easter Weekend)

II. Series: Easter

- Title: The Stone
- Text: Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-18
- Quote: Easter is not just the story of an empty tomb — it is the declaration that every dark night will meet its dawn, and every broken heart can rise again. Pastor Rick

III. Introduction

- Easter morning didn't begin with celebration. It began in the dark.
- Luke tells us, "On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared." (Luke 24:1 CSB). The women made their way to the tomb, determined to finish what they started. They weren't singing. They weren't expecting a miracle. They were carrying spices—symbols of grief, symbols of finality.
- They were going to honor a dead body, not meet the Living Savior.
- And I think that's where many of us quietly live — even on Easter Sunday. We show up. We smile. We say, "He is risen." But deep down, some of us are still standing in front of a stone that feels too heavy.
- A stone of disappointment.
A stone of unanswered prayer.
A stone of grief that lingers longer than we expected.
A stone of fear about what tomorrow might hold.
- The women didn't know it, but God had already been working in the dark long before they arrived. The stone wasn't rolled away so Jesus could get out. It was rolled away so they could see in.
- So, they could see that God does His best work in places we've already given up on.
- As we think about Easter this year, as we step into what it means to us, I want to invite you to bring your stone with you.
- For those of you listening to this message or reading the notes, I want to invite you to bring your stone with you.
- No to hide it. Not pretending it isn't heavy. But to place it before the God who moves stones we cannot.
- Because Easter is not just a story about what happened. It's a declaration about what still happens.
- He is risen. And because He is risen, hope rises too.

IV. Setting the Scene

- Complete darkness is not one of my favorite places. And being in complete darkness alone ... well, now you are talking about one of those great fears in my

life. I have been in complete darkness a couple of times – for a moment or two. Not fun. I was having this conversation the other day and trying to picture what it must have been like inside the tomb, behind the stone.

- Think about it. Jesus, the physical devastation was complete. The beatings, the torture, the hanging on the Cross, were in the past. Physically His appearance must have changed some. Our bodies react in that kind of way. Pierced side, nails in the hands and feet, face still swollen from the abuse, and back still raw from the beating.
- It was dark behind the stone, at least that is what would make sense. The absence of physical light. But the Light of the World was inside the tomb. There was separation from those around Him. But the hand of the Father can reach beyond physical limitations.
- We know this from our place in the story. Today it's almost 2000 years since this took place. We have the benefit of seeing from a distinct perspective. But it is still a perspective that requires faith and trust.

V. God is at Work (Even in the dark)

- **John 20:1 NLT** - *Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.*
- When John tells us that Mary went to the tomb “while it was still dark,” he’s not just giving us a timestamp. He’s giving us a condition of the soul.
- Darkness is where resurrection begins.
- Before there was an empty tomb ... before there was an angel ... before there was a shout of “He is risen” ... there was darkness.
- And that’s important, because darkness is the one place that it would be easy to assume God is absent.
- We assume silence means inactivity. We assume hiddenness means abandonment. We assume that if we can’t see Him working, He must not be working at all.
- But resurrection tells a different story.
- While Mary was walking toward the tomb in the dark, God had already moved. He had already acted. He had already defeated death. He had already rewritten the story.
- Mary didn’t know it yet. The disciples didn’t know it yet. The world didn’t know it yet. But heaven had already declared victory.
- And that’s how God often works in our lives.
- By the time you get to the place you’re worried about,
- God has already been there.
- By the time you arrive at the situation that scares you, God has already stepped into it. By the time you reach the thing you think will break you, God has already begun the miracle.

- Some of the greatest works of God happen in the dark — in the places where you can't see Him, can't feel Him, can't trace Him.
- But you can TRUST Him.
- Because resurrection didn't begin with light. It began with a God who works faithfully in the dark.

VI. Looking at the Impossible

- As the women walked toward the tomb, they carried spices in their hands and a question in their hearts: "Who will roll the stone away for us?"
- Look at what is recorded in the Gospels ... *"2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb at sunrise. 3 They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb for us?'" (Mark 16:2-3 CSB).*
- They were doing what many of us do — walking toward something God has called us to face but worrying about a barrier we have no power to move. They were faithful, but they were fearful. They were obedient, but they were overwhelmed. They were moving forward, but they were focusing on the obstacle and thinking about the problem they could not solve.
- And here's the irony: They were stressing over a problem God had already solved.
- This is what Matthew records ... *"After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to view the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and approached the tomb. He rolled back the stone and was sitting on it."* **(Matthew 28:1-2 CSB).**
- Matthew tells us that an angel had rolled the stone away. Not a committee. Not a group effort. Not a long struggle. One angel. One moment. One touch.
- The stone that looked impossible to them was effortless to God.
- And that's the message some of us need this Easter: The thing you're losing sleep over... the thing you're trying to figure out... the thing you've convinced yourself is immovable...
- God has already placed His hand on it.
- You're worried about the stone. God is focused on the resurrection. You're focused on the obstacle. God is focused on the outcome.
- You're focused on what you can't move. God has already moved it, and His focus is on you.
- The women didn't need to move the stone. They just needed to show up.
- And sometimes that's the most faith-filled thing you can do — keep walking toward the place where you last saw Jesus, even when you don't know how the stone is going to move.
- Because the God who conquered death is not intimidated by what intimidates you.

VII. Expectations

- God is in the business of rewriting our story. His grace is great enough, it is powerful enough to take the pain and suffering, the fears and failures, the mistakes, and poor choices, and turn them into a testimony that reveals His love and compassion to everyone around you.
- He does it by moving stones. At the tomb, the stone didn't need to be moved for Jesus to get out. It was moved so we could get in and see exactly what God could do.
- Max Lucado writes this, "The stone was moved—not for Jesus—but for the women; not so Jesus could come out, but so the women could see in!" (He Still Moves Stones: Everyone Needs a Miracle, 2003).
- When the women reached the tomb, they were prepared for one thing:
- death. They brought spices—symbols of grief, symbols of finality, symbols of a story they believed had ended. They came expecting to manage their pain, not witness a miracle.
- And then heaven interrupts their assumptions with a question that still echoes through history: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"
- **Luke 24:5-7 NLT**
5 The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."
- Think about what the Angel was telling them ... Is there a reason that you are looking for life in a place you've already labeled as over? Is your expectation one of defeat where God has already declared victory? Why are you standing in a graveyard when the story has moved on?
- The empty tomb is God's way of saying, "I'm not finished where you stopped believing."
- Every one of us has places in our lives where we've quietly written "The End."
- Places where we've stopped praying. Times we have lost hope. Moments where the expectation was nothing was going to change.
- You might have found it in a relationship that feels too broken. Or with a dream that feels too delayed. Perhaps it's a heart that feels too wounded. Or a tomorrow where uncertainty reigns.
- But resurrection means God steps into the chapters we thought were closed and writes something new. The empty tomb is not just a historical event — it is a theological declaration that nothing is beyond redemption.
- Your past – your sin – your failures – your grief – your story is not beyond the reach of God's mercy and grace. He is able to redeem what you view as insurmountable.

- When the angel said, “He is not here; He is risen,” he wasn’t just announcing that Jesus had walked out of the grave. He was announcing that death no longer gets the final word. Not over Jesus. Not over you.
- The resurrection means:
 - What you thought was dead can live again.
 - What you thought was over can begin again.
 - What you thought was broken can be restored again.
 - What you thought was lost can be redeemed again.
- The empty tomb rewrites every story we thought was finished.

VIII. He’s Calling You

- Let’s bring this together ...
- Mary Magdalene stands outside the tomb weeping. Not because she lacks faith. Not because she’s weak. But because she’s human.
- She’s grieving the loss of the One who gave her life back. She’s confused by an empty tomb she can’t explain. She’s overwhelmed by a future she can’t imagine.
- And in that moment—when her vision is blurred by tears, when her assumptions are shaped by grief, when she’s convinced the story has taken a tragic turn—
- Jesus does the most tender thing He could do. He calls her by name.
- **John 20:16 CSB** - *Jesus said to her, “Mary.” Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”—which means “Teacher.”*
- Jesus doesn’t preach a sermon, He doesn’t criticize, there isn’t an explanation. He gently calls her name.
- Is that what you are looking for? That tender moment when love and compassion wipe away everything else. When a soft word speaks louder than a shout. Mary had that.
- The miracle of the Resurrection is that it’s personal. It’s not just a theological event — it’s a relational encounter. It’s not just about defeating death—it’s about restoring what circumstances or criticism or condemnation tried to break.
- Mary didn’t recognize Him until He spoke her name. And that’s still how He meets us. In the midst of our tears, when confusion reigns, in those times when we feel distant – even alone.
- He speaks our name. He reminds us that He has not forgotten us. We aren’t abandoned. Nothing that has happened will cause us to be overlooked. His love for each of us is faithful and unwavering.
- The stone was never the final circumstance. Mary thought the stone meant the end. She thought the stone meant defeat. She thought the stone meant Jesus was gone forever.
- But the stone was just the setup for a greater revelation.
- The stone was rolled away not to expose death, but to reveal life. Not to confirm her fears, but to confront them. Not to seal her grief, but to shatter it.
- The stone was not the conclusion — it was the doorway to a new beginning.

- And Jesus calling her name was the proof.
- Because when the risen Christ speaks your name, everything that felt final suddenly becomes possible again.
- Your story isn't over. Hope isn't buried. Your future isn't sealed behind a stone. The shed tears are not the last chapter.
- The risen Jesus stands in the very place you thought was the end — and calls you into a new beginning.

IX. Last Words

- So, what is your stone?
- Easter reminds us that the stone was never the final circumstance. What looked like the end was only the beginning of grace. Before anyone believed ... before anyone understood ... before anyone showed up at the tomb with faith in their hearts ... grace had already moved.
- Grace rolled the stone away. Grace stepped into the darkness. Grace called Mary by name. Grace rewrote the story the enemy tried to finish.
- And that's the invitation of Easter: Grace goes first, and grace keeps going. Grace meets you in the dark. Grace moves what you cannot. Grace speaks your name when you're too broken to lift your head.
- Grace walks out of the grave so you can walk out of yours.
- So whatever stone you are carrying with you today — fear, shame, regret, grief — hear the good news of resurrection: Grace was there before you. Grace is here with you. Grace will carry you forward.
- He Is Risen! And that is the Good News.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always. Because the One who conquered the grave is still writing resurrection into every story that trusts Him.