

“He Still Moves Stones”

Rev. Susan M. Prichard

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John 20: 1-18

The story of the resurrection is a stumbling block for many people. They can otherwise buy the story of Jesus of Nazareth. He was, after all, a good man who was a great teacher and healer. Most everyone agreed that he spoke with authority unlike other rabbis. He certainly understood the holy scriptures, and interpreted them in such a way that they came alive for the people. Even Nicodemus of the Sanhedrian, who came to him at night, agreed that he must be from God; because only someone from God could do all that Jesus could do-- but this resurrection thing-- there's the rub.

The title for today's message is taken from a book by author, Max Lucado. In “He Still Moves Stones”, Lucado points out that God moved the stone away from Jesus' tomb NOT so that Jesus could get out, but so that we could see in. The resurrected Jesus didn't need to see inside the tomb, but those first Easter witnesses could not have-- would not have-- been witnesses if they hadn't been able to see that the tomb was empty. First, they had to see the empty tomb--- then, they could see the risen Jesus.

Many of us get hung up on trying to prove or disprove the resurrection. I'm not going to get into all the resurrection theories, and all the ways the great theologians have explained it. Because, for me-- gospel according to Susan again folks-- that's not why you came here this morning. IF you wanted to systematically study the pros and cons of the resurrection, you'd be off at seminary or locked up with books written by people who died centuries ago.

I believe, that people come to church on Easter Sunday to celebrate the power of God to change their lives. That's a heart thing, not a head thing. People come because of the great music and the joy filled message that speaks to their souls in ways they do not always understand. They just know in their hearts that this is where they belong.

The first people who met and experienced the ministry of Jesus, didn't know at first, what it was that drew them to him. But eventually they knew in their hearts that he spoke the truth to them in love. His message may not have made sense in their minds-- turning the other cheek, loving your neighbors, giving your possessions to the poor-- but their hearts recognized him and his message as being from God. He had the power to give meaning to their lives, especially to those who had been rejected by society. He gave hope where there had only been despair.

Many of you may be familiar with a book by Fulton Oursler called “The Greatest Story Ever Told”. It is the life of Jesus written in the form of a novel. In the last few pages of the book, Annas and Caiaphas are discussing the rumors of the resurrection and the dramatic change in the character of Jesus' followers before and after Jesus died. Where before he died his disciples were frightened and ran away when he was arrested in order to spare themselves the same fate. After the so-called resurrection, his disciples were so convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that he had risen from the dead that they now preached openly in the streets and bravely died for their beliefs. They were troubled that perhaps they had made a mistake, and maybe, just maybe Jesus was who he had claimed to be. Troubled because, instead of silencing his world changing message, they enhanced it.

Jim Taylor, the author of one of my favorite commentary series has this spin on things for today: “The bible is filled with stories of impossible people. They lied, they cheated, and they got it wrong. And yet, somehow, God was able to use the unsavory, the incompetent, and the just plain stupid to reveal God’s will and God’s intentions.

The great thing about the bible is not that these people are good examples to us. In fact, they are generally lousy examples. But in spite of them, God doesn’t give up. God is incredibly persistent, and keeps trying.

Why didn’t the bible simply tell God’s story, instead of cluttering it up with all those unsavory characters? Because until Jesus came along we had no real picture of God.” We only had people’s responses to God.

If we want to see some of God’s responses to people--we need only to look at some of the bible stories that show how Jesus moves the stones and touch human lives. “How does God react to dashed hopes? Read the story of Jairus. How does the Jesus feel about those who are ill? Stand with him at the pool of Bethesda. Do you long for God to speak to your lonely heart? Then listen as the Risen Jesus speaks to the Emmaus-bound disciples. What is God’s word to the shameful? Watch as Jesus draws in the dirt with his finger.”(aha! 3-28-05)

Taylor goes on to use this example. He asks us to think about dancers. “If one person whirls around in a waltz step, that person moves around his or her own center of gravity. When two people whirl, they whirl around a center of gravity somewhere between them. Now imagine that you could only see one of the pair. You could quickly tell whether that person was dancing alone, or with an invisible partner, by observing that counterbalancing effect. After a while, you could tell a lot about the invisible partner by the moves of the visible partner.

That’s what we have in the bible-- the stories of the visible partners. We can only know the invisible partners by how the visible partners act.

In the bible, God is the invisible partner.”

When Jesus came into the world, we learned even more about his invisible partner, God. Jesus life and teachings make more sense when we remember that he was not dancing or acting alone, but with God. The actions of the disciples make more sense when we realize that their invisible partner was now the risen Jesus. And that they now had with them his awesome power of love that affected their lives and therefore their actions. The stones of their former selves had been moved away to allow them to be the disciples Jesus had called them to be. His love was now their love, his words were now their words, his mission was now their mission. Once the stone had been rolled away-- he told them to “go tell”-- go tell what you’ve seen and heard.

Those first Easter witnesses, did not know what we know. They were shocked and stunned by their first encounters with the Risen Christ.

For me, the message of Easter is that the God who loved us into creation, loves us enough to change our lives. If we’ll let him, God will be our invisible partner-- if we let him, God will roll away

the stones that trip us up, that knock us down, that harden our hearts, that hold us back from being the loving, light filled beings we were created to be. Let us celebrate the awesome power of love that raised Jesus from death and changed the lives of millions who have experienced that love first hand.

Thanks be to God. Amen.