

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and

amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Some things in life are hard, there is just no doubt about it. We all go through ups and downs, often going from happy to sad in the same day or even in the same hour. Karen and I just recently had a night away where we stayed at the Mall of America and went to see a live comedian, who was hilarious. We did some junking on the way home, which is one of our favorite pastimes. Karen was just starting Spring Break, I got a surprise check from the bishop for SAMs who are continuing their education, as was the wish of a man who left money just for this cause. Things were great. Then, suddenly, one of our beloved pets died. Granted, she was 17 years old, but that didn't make the pain any less. She started breathing weirdly on Saturday when we got home from the cities. She stopped

eating. We were in a snowstorm and couldn't bring her to the vet. Tuesday morning, she passed away. We did have about 3 days to prepare that she would likely die, but our grief was still great.

Imagine if we had been sitting at the table on Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room, being told that not only would our friend Jesus die soon, but that it would be because one of us betrayed Him. When His death actually came, they were not surprised, as they had been told it would happen. They had time to prepare. Yet, their grief was still great.

The ups and downs of feelings that the disciples had during their short 3 years with Jesus must have been confusing. The elation of discovering who He truly was, the wonder of seeing Him perform miracles and love others unconditionally. The fear when it was discovered

that the High Priests wanted to kill Jesus. The confusion and doubt when Jesus predicted that one of the twelve would betray Him and another would deny Him. The grief and pain when they watched Him be crucified. Ups and downs, rollercoasters of emotions.

But, even though Jesus was now dead and His friends were in the middle of their grieving, yet another set of emotions were introduced. As Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Him, they first wondered who would help them move the heavy stone away from the tomb so that they could enter it. But, just like many times in all of our lives, the problem was solved before they had to worry too much about it. The stone was already moved. They didn't understand why the stone was moved, just like many times in our lives when we don't understand why things have happened.

This type of thing has happened in our lives so many times. When I lost my job as a 5th grade teacher, before I even had time to worry about what in the world I was going to do and how in the world I was going to find another teaching job at my age and with my education level - which, in essence, meant that I was too expensive and a new, young, much cheaper teacher was guaranteed to replace me - I was approached by the mental health worker that had been in my classroom all year with me. I barely had time to worry about how things would proceed when she convinced me to come and work at the Summer program, working with kids who had mental health diagnoses. 20 some years later, I was still working in the mental health field. The big, huge stone of doubt and the big obstacle in my way was gone - removed by someone before I had to even worry about it.

I am sure others here could give examples of times when a big obstacle in their life was removed somehow, by someone, just in time. The fact that the women even expressed concern about who would roll away the large stone blocking the entrance to the tomb indicates their intention to honor Jesus' body despite the obstacles. And thus, despite any obstacles in our lives, we still need to remember the promise. We still need to honor Jesus and the sacrifice He made for us. Our little issues such as a dog dying or losing a job are temporary moments of shock and grief. They are nothing compared to what Jesus suffered. Knowing the story of Jesus can help us put all of our emotions into context.

So, once Mary Magdeline, Mary mother of James and Salome realized that the stone was already removed, then came the roller coaster of emotions again. Who moved it? Why was it moved? Where is Jesus? Who took His body?

Their grief was temporarily replaced with alarm when they saw a man dressed in white in the tomb. But, this man said to them, “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” They were filled with terror and amazement. But, they surely were also filled with glee and excitement upon hearing that Jesus had been raised from the dead!

The ups and downs of our everyday emotions are always easier to accept when we realize two things: First, in difficult times, the stone will always be rolled away. In other words, the insurmountable obstacles will be removed because God will always be with us. If the path we are on is not the one God wants us on, He will redirect us if we listen to Him. He will make our paths straight and our burdens lighter, just as the task of moving the stone away from the tomb was taken care of. And second, that

because Jesus promised that we will see Him again, whatever Earthly troubles we are having are only temporary. When we think of Heaven, we need to remember that Jesus went ahead of us, so there we will see Him, just as He told us.

Acts 14:22 says, Paul and Barnabas returned from where they had been stoned and left to die, preaching the gospel and strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

John 16:33 says: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

1 John 5:4 says: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

And finally, Revelation 3:21 says: “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

So, My Friends, because the stone was rolled away, because the body was gone, and because he had traveled ahead to Galilee to find His disciples, we are free. He Lives and therefore, so will we. Through all of life's ups and downs, we live. We live in the hope that He gave us. There is no reason to be afraid. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

It is through your unending love, grace, and forgiveness that we are able to have hope. This love, grace, and forgiveness brought your Son not only to death but to a glorious resurrection. This is why we believe. Through every up and down of life, we will always remember the sacrifices that were made for our sake. And for those, we are forever grateful. We know that every big stone that needs to be rolled away for us will be, if only we have enough faith in You. And, we know that Jesus went on ahead and that we will see Him someday, just as He promised. So we should not be afraid. Fill our hearts with grace and kindness so we may spread your love in our every action. Amen.

