



## St John Lutheran Church

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### John 20:1-18

#### Easter: Only Jesus Can Roll Away Stones

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

When I'm at a funeral, I've learned never to say, "I know just how you feel." No two people carry the same grief for the same reasons. **Though grief may** carry many similarities from one situation to the next... **everyone's** grief is unique. **Grief is like** the stones we place upon our graves. **No two stones** are ever exactly alike. **When someone comes** to us in our grief and says, "I know just how you feel," we may want to scream, "No! You do not know how I feel, and how dare you even suggest that you know how I feel!"

**Jesus knows this. Whether we are** grieving, hurting, lonely, depressed, frustrated, or experiencing one of a hundred different human conditions, we are never feeling quite the same as any other given person. **Jesus knows He** must look into our hearts and minister to us as individuals. **He knows He** must find a way to break through our grief, our loneliness, or our depression and put joy

and hope back into our hearts. **As a pastor** I really don't comfort people. **I know that** I can't. **Only Jesus can. I only show them** Jesus and tell them about His resurrection and the stone that was rolled away on Easter morning. **Then I let** Jesus roll away the stones that have been covering their hearts.

**In our lengthy** text for this morning, we see the message of Easter brought to two individuals, Peter and Mary Magdalene. **Each of them** needed to experience Jesus' resurrection for a different reason. **This morning their** joy in the Risen Savior will show us that only Jesus can roll away stones!

**If you were** one of there that day... **what would** you have said to Peter after Jesus died? **How would you** try to comfort him? **I doubt if** the disciples said anything at all. **What could they** say? **"Peter, don't take it so hard. You'll get over it. We are all to blame."// That's the** way the world tries to deal with guilt. **Spread it around** or explain it away. **Some just hope** it goes away. **Others wait until** they become numb. **Still others try** to minimize the sin. **They keep telling** themselves that it wasn't so bad after all or that everyone does it.

**Peter felt terrible. I doubt if** anyone could say anything that would really make Peter feel better.

**Peter's grief was** unique...**and in** reality, all grief is unique. **Everyone experiences and** handles grief differently. **The other disciples** had fled in the garden too. **But remember the** last thing that Jesus had heard Peter say. **That night in** the courtyard of the high priest, Peter cursed and swore and said, **"I don't know this Jesus you're talking about. I've never met him."// Just imagine** how much it must have hurt Jesus to have Peter... **the one** who He pulled out of the waves of the sea of Galilee... Peter **had** sworn to die rather than deny Jesus...**but when** things got tough Peter went ahead and tried to pretend not to know Him at all. **The Bible tells** us that these words were being said at the moment Jesus was being led past where Peter stood. **After those words** of denial, Jesus looked at Peter. **So that Friday,** while He watched Jesus die... **Peter no doubt** remembered that look on Jesus' face in the courtyard. **All day Saturday,** while the disciples sat in stunned silence... **Peter had** the face of Jesus burned in his memory. **He would never** forget that look.

**On that Easter** morning, Mary had seen the stone rolled away and immediately ran back to tell the disciples. **She imagined the** worst... **that somebody stole Jesus' Body. Peter and John** ran to the tomb. **Were they already** beginning to think in terms of the resurrection? **People with guilty** consciences don't like to confront that guilt. **I have to believe** that hope was stirring in their hearts. **John was younger,** or maybe just faster...**but John** got there first and **he waited** for Peter so Peter could go in first. **All the burial** clothes were lying there in neat order... **with** the linen strips lying undisturbed, collapsed like an empty shell... **and** the head cloth neatly folded and laid to the side. **John says of himself,** He saw and believed (v. 8).

**And what about** Peter? **For Peter,** his stone was not yet rolled away. **Luke tells us** that he went away, wondering to himself what had happened (Luke 24:12). **But later Luke** tells us that the disciples told the two disciples from Emmaus, **"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon"** (Luke 24:34).**// Sometime that day** Jesus came to Peter alone...**and you** understand why. **Jesus knew that** He had to erase the guilt Peter carried with him from the courtyard of the

high priest. **Don't you wish** you could have been there to hear Peter blurt out, "**Lord, I'm sorry! I didn't mean those words!**"?// **Did Jesus wipe** away the tears of sorrow from Peter's eyes and look into his face and say, "**Peter, I forgive you**"? **We don't know.**

**The Bible doesn't** tell us what happened between Jesus and Peter that day. **It's left to our** imaginations. **But we know** Jesus rolled away the stone of guilt from Peter's heart. **For the rest** of his days on earth... **Peter would** tell people everywhere about Jesus. **He later wrote,** "**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you**" (1 Peter 1:3,4).//

**We all have** stones of guilt that needed to be rolled away ...**and only** Jesus is up to the task. **Maybe you have** denied him too. **Maybe sometime in** your life you have lived a life that said, "**I don't know the man.**" **Those days may** be over now....**but** the memory of them still lingers. **Maybe you failed** someone close to you...**your** parents? **perhaps** your children? **your** husband or wife? **Or perhaps you** just realized again this morning that you have failed God every day of your life.

**If Jesus had** only died on Golgotha and his Body still lay in the tomb... **then you** would never be able to say, "**Jesus, I'm sorry; forgive my sins.**" **But that is** not so. **He's alive! He's risen! He's alive to** see your tears and hear your confession! **He's alive to** tell you once more, through His Word, "**I forgive your sins; I forgive all your sins.**" **He's alive to** help you in your recovery from guilt and in your eagerness to start a new life again...**He's alive to** heal you... **what ever** your guilt... **and He** can do it today!! PAUSE

**What about Mary** Magdalene? **The Bible tells** us simply that Jesus had driven seven evil spirits from her (Mark 16:9). **She and several** other women also followed him and helped support his ministry out of their own means (Luke 8:3). **That's not much** of a biographical sketch, is it? **But it is** enough. **Satan had bound** her, and Jesus set her free. **The mercy of** Jesus was enough motivation for her to give up her life and follow Him.

**She must have** loved Jesus deeply. **She was among** the first to come to the tomb that morning to anoint his Body with spices. **When she discovered** Jesus was gone... **she ran** back in distress and confusion to tell the other disciples that someone had stolen His Body. **When she returned,** after Peter and John had already come to the tomb and gone... **she just** stood outside the tomb crying. **Those of you** who have experienced grief can better understand how she felt. **Yet, as I** said earlier, how can one person ever really know how another person feels at such a time? **She lost more** than a friend. **The One in** whom she believed was dead. **Now...How could she** follow a Savior who had died?

**Finally she bent** over to look into the tomb. **The angels asked** her why she was crying, and still she couldn't quite understand. **When a person's** heart is breaking... **it is** difficult to hear or think at all. **So Mary turned** away from them, and then a voice behind her said, "**Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?**" (v. 15).// **Perhaps she not** see clearly through her tears... **and so she thought it** must have been the gardener. "**Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me**

where you have put him, and I will get him" (v. 15)//. **Did she think** she could do this by herself?

**Then Jesus said, "Mary"** (v. 16). **When Jesus spoke** her name in love... **instantly she knew** who this was. **She turned to reach for Him...to hold Him and never let go.** **Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"//** (v. 17). **What do these words mean? She wanted to cling to Him so that she would never lose Him again. But Jesus said, in effect, "Mary, you don't have to hold on to me. I am ascending to my Father and I will NEVER leave you!"**

**Why did Jesus** appear in such a special way to Mary Magdalene? **Because only Jesus** knew her grief. **Jesus could look** into her heart and feel her sorrow... **and He** knew exactly what she needed to hear in order to roll away the stone from her broken heart.

**Most of you** have experienced the kind of grief that breaks the heart! **If you haven't yet... you will.** **And when you** do, someone will come to you and say, **"I know just how you feel."** **You will probably** be kind and say nothing, because you know they mean well. **But inside you** will be screaming, **"You do NOT know how I feel! NO ONE knows how I feel!"** **And you will believe** that this is true...**that** no one can understand your grief and that somehow you must bear it alone.

**But there is** someone who knows... **someone who** understands...**His Name is Jesus.** **This is why** He came to save you. **He knows how** death crushes us and causes us fear and pain like nothing else. **He knows** your heart from the inside out. **When you hide** your broken heart from everyone else... **Jesus is there** to see your inner tears. **He knows what** you need to hear in order to roll away the stone that covers the joy in your heart. **In fact, you** came here this morning to once again experience the power of Jesus' resurrection... **to hear** your Savior say that He loves you. **You came to hear that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.**

**All who believe** in Him will live and not die...**they...we... will have** everlasting life!! **In fact we** have it now as a present possession...**that is** His gift to you in baptism! **If that stone** of grief and pain wants to roll back into its place tomorrow, **Jesus will** come again and speak to your heart through His Word. **This is what** the faith is all about...**this is** why today is a Day of great joy and exultation! **Jesus lives! And because He lives...all who** trust in Him will live...**just as He lives NOW. Death is defeated! We are Heaven bound...nothing else** can mean so much as the gift of Life that comes to us through our Living and Breathing Jesus...**the Son** of God who never leaves us...**the Son** of God who will come again in Glory to take us to His Home!

**He's risen! He's risen indeed! No one can roll away the stones better than Jesus!** In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.

Feast of the Resurrection, 2008

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