

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

*Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. He is going ahead of you.
Alleluia!*

The stone was large and heavy, Mark reveals in his Gospel, but the angel, unseen, rolled it away; and in rolling it away, the angel opened a door into the heart and soul — the very Being of God. In the glory of God's Being — in that heart of everlasting loving — in the light in which there is no darkness at all — Jesus abides as God's completed, yet ever new Creation. In him, resurrected now, the beginning and end of all things abides in life-sustaining affection.

"Come," the angel says, "Look, there is the place they laid him." There is the place of death made life, or resurrection and life. Go, tell everyone that everything has changed. What was certain death is life. What was humiliating defeat is victory. What was despair is hope. What was crushing disappointment is faith. All made glorious in light and thrilling anthem in the very place of essential darkness and deadly silence. God has stretched out God's arms and embraced all time and space, all life and death, and holds it now in God's kingdom come.

The women stumbled back to Peter and the disciples overcome with amazement. "And," as some texts of Marks' Gospel conclude, "after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

In his book, *A New Heaven*, Bishop Richard Holloway asks, "What then is left for us to do? Do we just wait for the return of Christ who is present in a hidden manner in the folds of history?" Yes and no. Yes and no because we still live, like the women at the tomb, in the dialectic of the dust we are and the glory that is revealed to us. In and out of the glory of the resurrection, in and out of the tomb, all at the same time.

Yes, because all of this is from Christ, who is reconciling the world to himself. Only Christ can do the New Creation by his Spirit that dwells in us. It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

No, because as Paul continues, Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Our Easter mission is to go ourselves to the tombs of our world and roll away the large and heavy stones of death and despair, to open the door to the glory that resides within — to the glory that enfolds, to the love that breathes life and peace. And they are large, these tombs, and heavy, these stones, with death. 100 million have been killed outright in wars this past century, the largest bloodbath in history, and the deaths continue in Iraq — tens of thousands — and in Afghanistan, and Gaza, and in civil strife on Africa, and in drug wars in Mexico, and on Baltimore's murder-a-day streets. It is just in the horrible silence and tragedy of this tomb that we proclaim resurrection. He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies by his Spirit dwelling within us. This tomb is already filled with resurrection and life.

We go to the tomb of unjust rule, where genocide can actually become accepted public policy, where ecological self-destruction is an actual possibility, where nuclear disaster is still a threat, where torture is an accepted practice. It is just at this tomb that we proclaim resurrection. Christ reigns as Lord of Lords, King of kings, until "every ruler and every authority and power, every enemy is put under his feet."

But we also go to the tomb of personal despair. Henri Nouwen writes, "Jesus didn't rise from the dead to prove that those who crucified him made a mistake, or to confound his opponents, or to impress rulers, or to force us to believe." Jesus' resurrection was the full affirmation of God's love for him. Therefore, he appeared in resurrection only to those in whom he manifested the full affirmation of his love for them. To Mary Magdalene and Peter, the twelve and James. Thus we go to those we love who are broken, frightened, despairing, lost, alienated, and just there in quiet and tenderly personal ways, proclaim resurrection. Point to the light that shines out from within their despair the certainty of resurrection and life. The loving embrace of God that is our hope. The certainty of God's redeeming presence that is our faith.

And then, last of all, because we are always reluctant to go there, we are called to visit the tomb of our sin and faithlessness. This stone is perhaps the heaviest of all to roll away. We need the help of the angel in the garden. It is really all right. We can dare to look into the deepest recesses of our sin and hope to live. How could I be so blind as to disregard Jesus' teaching? How can I be so self-possessed as to disregard the needs and feelings of others? How can I be so cruel to choose expediency over love? Why don't I take up my cross and follow him, despite my fear? Sin grips each of us in its own sinister and compelling way.

So, we take heart and push the stone away and peer onto the face of our sin. And there is Christ Jesus — showing us his hands and his side, the scars on him of our sin, and with those scarred hands he folds us into the arms of unwarranted forgiveness and life. "I live," he says to us, and because I live, raised by the love of my Father into glory, so you shall live also. Enter into my joy.

Easter begins at the tomb, but Easter's end is the rolling away of every stone that separates the Creation from the glory of God.

Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here. He is going ahead of you. You shall see him. Alleluia.