

Rev. Luke C. Werre
Peace, Sun Prairie
Easter Sunrise
April 12, 2020

Mark 16:3

WHO WILL ROLL AWAY THE STONE?

I wish it wouldn't have to be mentioned. But it is the proverbial elephant in the room, as there are cars in the parking lot, yet I am here in an empty church sanctuary. For the past month and a half in nearly every form of media we have heard about almost nothing other than Covid19, the coronavirus.

Perhaps it would be good for us to pause and ask ourselves why the panic, why over this virus? Surely, there have been other social scourges equally as damaging. We could explore this question for hours, I imagine. But at the very least there seems to have been this outcome on all of us...it seems that the coronavirus has pulled back a curtain of illusion from us—the illusion that we're going to go on living forever in this world. The Bible says *God has put eternity in the hearts of men*. That means no one wakes up in the morning expecting to die. Even when we hear of the deaths of others, we think, "That won't happen to me." We don't like to think about death. We don't like to talk about it. We don't want to have to face it. But like it or not, coronavirus has robbed us of our false sense of security and exposed how frail our earthly lives are. It is causing us to be exposed to the reality of death.

Christian apologist C.S. Lewis lived during World War I, a war that gruesomely claimed tens of millions of lives. He observed that though war is a terrible thing, the sentiment that it increases death is not quite correct. For death is complete to every generation. Like it or not, you and I will die one day.

Coronavirus is like the blanket or shroud covering the nations we heard about in the Isaiah 25 reading today. Coronavirus puts all of us under a blanket of dread, because of its deadly threat.

But this morning brings us good news. You have been rescued from coronavirus. Not by mitigation, by social distancing or by a vaccine. You have been rescued by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. When He rose from the dead Jesus ripped away the stifling shroud of death that covered us. He has robbed coronavirus of any power to stop us from living, for He promises never-ending life to all who have faith in Him.

Imagine how hard it must have been for the disciples and the women who followed Jesus to sit through all of Saturday wondering just what had happened? They were sort of under a "Safer at Home" requirement. It was a Jewish religious requirement that they rest at home on Saturdays. They weren't anticipating an Easter celebration like you and I. They hadn't connected the dots yet. After Good Friday, they were numb.

The women got up at the crack of dawn. They made sure they had everything they needed. The ointments and herbs. The wraps and linens. But one important detail they'd forgotten: Who would roll the stone away from the opening of the tomb?

Your and my bodies will be blocked from the land of the living one day, not by a stone, but more likely by 6 feet of dirt. Even more disturbing than that thought is why we will end up there. The Bible says we die because we are inherently sinful, inherently under God's disapproval. Death is God's punishment on sin. This is where it becomes really uncomfortable. If that is how God looks at us, that death comes because of sin, then what does that mean for us after we die? We don't want to have to go there. But we will have to go there whether we want to or not. And the Bible confirms our worst fears. After death comes the judgment of hell.

We instinctively know it. That's why all people dread death, why we cry at the death of a loved one. If none of this were true, if death were perfectly natural and not a judgment of God, no one would be alarmed by coronavirus.

"Who will roll away the stone?" the women asked. An angel rolled away the stone for the women. But Jesus rolls away death itself for you and me. For when Jesus hung on the cross on Good Friday, He took away the cause of death. He took the blame for all our sin on Himself. God punished Jesus with judgment instead of punishing you and me. Now God declares anyone who trusts what Jesus did for them, forgiven! Pardoned! Released from guilt! No longer being held liable by God. Forgiven. Sin not being counted against you because it was counted against Jesus in your place.

Had Christ stayed in the tomb dead on Easter morning, we could not know that God had ever forgiven us for our sins. But the fact that Jesus came back to life, the fact that He made sure His own tomb was laid open for the world to see –this tells us that by His death on the cross He atoned for our sin. By His death He made the sacrifice to compensate for our sinful hearts, and God the Father accepted that payment wholeheartedly.

Christ came back to life! That means the punishment for our sins has been lifted away.

Forgiven. That's what you are!

Forgiven! Of course then, coronavirus doesn't own you. Cancer doesn't own you. Nothing owns you but Jesus Christ.

Forgiven! Of course then death is no longer punishment for sin. Not for someone who holds on to Jesus.

Forgiven! Of course then there's no stone, no layer of dirt that can hold you in the ground. Not for someone who holds on to Jesus.

Forgiven! Of course then there's no disapproval of you or judgment from God on you. Not for someone who holds on to Jesus.

Forgiven! Of course then there's no fear of hell in your heart. Not for someone who holds on to Jesus.

Who will roll the stone away? Who will roll your sin away? Who will roll death away? Christ has! See the empty tomb. See that the stone no longer blocks the way. See Christ's forgiveness, salvation and glory pouring forth out of that tomb onto you. Nothing now stands in the way between you and your God. Now nothing stands in the way of you living forever. He promises to raise your body from death, from the ground one day, just as He rose from the dead, and take you with Himself to heaven. Jesus said, *Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*