

**The Rolled Away the Stone**  
**Mark 15:42-47**

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This fall we have been crossing the wide river of scripture by stepping on stones as we go. These stones serve as the characters in our many stories. If we listen, what do these stones tell us, what story do they share?

It could be that we have saved the best for last, or at least the hardest. Our story features a huge stone, a wheel stone that can cover the entrance to a Palestinian tomb.

What does this stone tell us? What does it conceal and what does it reveal? It is the stone that marks the boundary between life and death. The stone is heavy, hard to move, and meant to stay put. This stone seals, protects and conceals. And what is the cargo this stone secures? It safeguards the body of Jesus, of course; the tragedy, the unspeakable loss, and what seems to be the end of a dream.

This stone is a marker, the dark sign of the victory of death, the end of the road, the terrible and harsh verdict on a failed messiah and humanity gone dark. This stone does not bring good news. Not yet.

At Thanksgiving we often give thanks for life, harvest, the land and the goodness of God. As Aaron Copeland set the words of Horace Everett to music in *The Promise of Living*: “The promise of living with hope and thanksgiving is born of our loving, our friends and our labor.”

Even so, I am here with an unusual proclamation, that the stone in front of Jesus’ tomb *is* part of that thanksgiving, though it clearly doesn’t appear so. Beneath the surface of our mourning is a surprising gladness. Why? Because the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty, a sign for us.

The stone is like a swinging door: Life and death are one, endings and beginnings are connected, and the grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to spring forth in a bountiful harvest.

In a way the stone is like a partition that separates our material reality from the deeper eternity that underlies everything. Viewed from the outside the stone signifies death, but viewed from the inside it is the life that never dies. And that, I think, is the great challenge for all of us, to believe, to know, to sense there is deeper realm of pure energy and light hiding beneath the veil. It is there all the time but is hidden to us. In critical moments the curtain is lifted so that we can glimpse this hidden power. We often know it at the most critical times, when hope is dashed or faith is tested to the core. Then the stone rolls away.

So very often a beginning requires an ending and an ending is the seed of a new beginning. The same stone that covers Jesus' tomb rolls two ways at once:

- To conceal and reveal
- To close and to open
- To lose and to gain
- To sow and to reap

The problem, of course, is that we are trained to focus on the one thing that can be seen and so cannot see everything else that surrounds it.

Just recently I heard about some interesting research done on gratitude. They studied those who held a marked sense of gratitude and those who did not and the gratitude group could actually “see” many more blessings around them than the non-gratitude group. If you are grateful, thankful, you are open to seeing many more things for which you are thankful, many more blessings. The thankful soul knows the world to be a place of thankful wonders. Seeing begins in the heart.

Do you remember the story of the man at night down on all fours searching under a lamp post? He was frantically searching, searching, searching. A friend wandered by and asked him what he was doing.

“I lost my key to the house and I’m trying to find it.”  
“I see,” said the friend. “Are you sure you lost it here?”

“Oh no,” said the man on all fours. “I lost it over by the door.”

“Well, then why are you looking for it here?”

“Because the light is better here.”

We often search in the places where our mind expects to “see” something. But by limiting our search to only what is expected we miss the vast reality around us. If all you expect is a stone sealing a tomb then you may never notice when it is rolled away. If you only search where you can see, the key will never be found.

And what if this stone at the entrance of the tomb is also a description of what goes on in our deepest spiritual selves? What if that stone, door and tomb is really more like a *portal*?

Imagine this: Deep within each of us there is the path of transformation that requires our dying to some things and rising to others, letting go and taking up, saying goodbye and saying hello.

Time and again we experience this passing through the tomb, the birth canal, the tunnel between womb and world, between life and rebirth.

I want to suggest that this stone acts like an inner Rosetta stone; it blocks our path but at the same time holds the translation key to our future.

Sometimes the things that block us also provide a way out or up or beyond. I think of the multitudes of little sealed tombs people carry in their minds and hearts, sealed tombs that carry our losses, failures, trauma and sadness. By the grace of God the stones may be rolled away, one at a time, and reveal the empty tomb of resurrection – full of love and light. And then the past wounds become passage ways to the future with renewed strength and love and compassion.

When we experience those epiphanies we know, personally, why the early Christian proclamation is so true: Jesus Christ, dead, buried, and after three days risen from the tomb. Of course it’s true; we know it in our guts and own experience. This is the grace of God working in the world and in us.