

“THERE’S ALWAYS EASTER!”

Mark 16:1-7

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Prayer: Loving God, open my heart and mind to the message of Easter. Amen.

When our kids were growing up, one of our favorite places to vacation was Salter Path, North Carolina. We used to take our pop-up camping trailer to the oceanfront and set up camp for two weeks. Most of our time was spent on the beach, and one of our favorite activities was making sand castles. Now the tide in North Carolina is quite dramatic. If we built a sand castle at low tide, it was only a matter of time until it was washed away. Occasionally the boys would try to build a wall of sand to keep the waves from knocking down and destroying what we had built. They would continue to work as the water came closer and closer to the castle. But eventually, you know what happened: the waves came, and our sand castle was washed away.

You can’t stop the tide!

When we were first married, my wife, Barb, worked the night shift as a nurse. In order for her to get some decent sleep during the day, we bought heavy, room-darkening shades. As hard as we tried to cover the windows, some light always came through. I was reminded this morning as I drove to Lakeview Cemetery for the Easter Sunrise Service, daylight comes every morning! No matter what you try to do, **you can’t hold back the dawn of a new day!**

My message this morning is simple and straightforward: **after every Good Friday, there is an Easter.** The first Good Friday long ago demonstrated the world at its worst. Evil seemingly got the upper hand. Justice was perverted, and an innocent man was killed. But God had not been defeated. Sunday morning God demonstrated that love is stronger than hate; good will win out over evil; hope will prevail over despair; life will be victorious over death. After every Good Friday, **there’s always Easter!** After every setback and blow that knocks us for a loop, God always comes through. Always. Always. Always. **There’s always Easter!** God is always by our side.

The Easter story, told simply and beautifully by the Gospel writer, Mark, is the story of God’s involvement in every human life. Three women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus that first Easter morning. These women had heard him teach. These women had seen him perform miracles. These women had been inspired by his sermons. More important, these women’s lives had been changed because of Jesus. Now he was dead. They could hardly believe it, but they knew it was true. There were a million things they would rather have done than go to the tomb that Easter morning. They were sad and depressed and frankly not in the mood to visit a cemetery. Yet the Bible tells us they came to the tomb. They came because commitment means that you do your duty, even when you aren’t in the mood. Commitment

means carrying on in spite of feelings, in spite of outward circumstances.

They brought spices, because they planned to encounter a dead body. Not knowing that Jesus had been raised, they were prepared for a reality that no longer existed. How many of us are carrying spices this morning, holding on to things we no longer need? How many of us are working with an outdated map of reality?

As they walked along the path to the cemetery, all of a sudden it struck them that the entrance to the tomb had been sealed by a large boulder placed in front of the door. *“Who will roll away the stone for us?”* they began to ask each other. Who will remove the pain, the heartache, the problems that weigh us down and keep us from being the people God is calling us to be? Who will roll away the stones from our lives, for even with all the self-help books on the shelf there are problems that just seem too big for us to handle.

I remember a time I was dealing with what seemed to be an insurmountable problem, and I finally said to someone, “You know, I always have a ‘Plan B.’ But this time, There’s no Plan B. I simply don’t know what to do next!” Who will roll away the stone? Who will tackle the insurmountable situations facing your life and mine?

I have read some of these Bible stories dozens of times, and every time I read them something different speaks to me. I have been preparing Easter sermons for 37 years, but this year the verse that knocked me off my feet was verse four, where it says, *“When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.”* As long as they were looking down, they were filled with bewilderment and frustration and despair. (Luke will tell us the same thing about the male disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus.) But when they **looked up**, they saw that the stone was already rolled away. While they had been busy brooding about their problems, God had already taken care of the situation.

One day recently I was already awake when the alarm went off. I was lying in bed dreading the day to come. I had made a to do list the night before and I was just certain I wasn’t going to get everything done that had to be done on that particular day. I was half-defeated before I started. But then I had my morning prayer time, and something I read in my devotions reminded me that this was God’s day, and that God was in control, and that I shouldn’t spend my energy worrying about what I needed to do and what might happen, but trust God for the outcome. The truth is, things went much better that day than I thought they would! Why did I spend so much time worrying about who would roll away the stone? When I looked up, I saw that the stone had already been rolled back. While I was busy worrying, God was busy taking care of the situation. I have said before that worrying is simply not Christian, for it implies a lack of trust in God. How often I need to be reminded of that!

Now when the women enter the tomb, they discover that, lo and behold, Jesus is not there! Have grave robbers stolen his body? There were people then as now who had no respect and would steal corpses to retrieve jewelry and other things that could be sold for quick money. But the news is not bad; it is good. Jesus has been raised from the dead!

“He has been raised; he is not here.” While the initial interest is in Jesus’ body and its absence from the tomb, the church has never focused on the absence of Jesus body, but on the presence of Jesus’ spirit. You see, Easter means a great deal more than simply the resuscitation of the corpse of Jesus. What the disciples encountered was infinitely more awesome. Jesus has been raised to a new life; he has not returned to an old life. In Christ’s resurrection, the old world has ended; a whole new world has begun. To be sure, the present world, after Easter, still

looks like the old world before Easter. There is still suffering and pain and disappointment. Yet for those who encounter the risen Christ in his many manifestations — the disciples on the Emmaus road, Saul on the road to Damascus, many believers in the worship of the church and elsewhere — his resurrected presence is a sign of the in-breaking of a whole new world. The women at the garden tomb are given a preview of the future, a disclosure of the last act of the drama. The secret of the ages is now revealed: God will triumph over the powers of evil. Life, not death, will have the last word.

Martin Luther King, Jr., while rallying support for the civil rights movement, boldly proclaimed, *“We must be reminded anew that God is at home in his universe. God is not outside the world looking on with a sort of cold indifference. As we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, the God of the universe struggles with us.”* (1) Because of Easter, God is with us in the struggle. He has already taken care of the stones that weigh us down and keep us from being the people God wants us to be. Now he beckons us to take the next step into the future, a future known only to God.

The angel’s message to the women on that first Easter is God’s message to us this 21st century Easter: *“He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”* Galilee is the place where they lived and worked. Galilee is where the Bible tells us we will meet Jesus. No matter where we have to go, Jesus will go with us. In fact, the Bible tells us that he goes ahead of us and will be there for us, no matter what we face in life. Henri Nouwen reminds us that *“It is the victory of Jesus, who has called you. He overcame for you the power of death so that you could live in freedom. You have to claim that victory, and not live as if death still controlled you.”* Nouwen continues, *“Trust the victory and let your mind and emotions gradually be converted to the truth. You will experience new joy and new peace as you let that truth reach every part of your being. Don’t forget,”* Nouwen counsels, *“Victory has been won, the powers of darkness no longer rule, love is stronger than death.”* (2)

Our challenge is to live Easter, to live the new life that God sets before us. Do not live as if death still controls you. Do not live as though the world and its value system and its power structure have the upper hand and the last word. Instead, live the victorious life that God has made possible because of Easter.

Frankly, it’s hard to live Easter in a world such as ours. It’s hard to look up when there is so much pulling us down. That’s why we need to hear the story again and again. When we get discouraged, when we get beaten down, when evil and injustice and selfishness and hate seem to get the upper hand, we need to remember that after every Good Friday, **there’s always Easter**. You can’t stop the tide; you can’t hold back the dawn. New life is possible, not just someday when we die, but here and now, today.

No matter what happens, **there’s always Easter!** Look up! The stone has already been rolled away!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the message of Easter. Thank you for rolling away the stone so that we can live the full, free life that you intend. Thank you for the new life that you offer us, not just someday when we die, but here and now, today. Help us to live Easter this day and every

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day. Amen.

Notes:

1. King, Martin Luther, Jr. *The Strength to Love*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. p. 64.
2. Nouwen, Henri. *The Inner Voice of Love*. New York: Doubleday, 1996. P. 92.

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