

Resurrection is not a one-time event.

Resurrection is not a collection of stories.

Resurrection is the nature of human life.

Resurrection is about being alive

in spite of whatever life may bring – when you – I – we - are in touch with the spirit.

But the stories – and this one-time event that we celebrate today - helps us learn about it.

So – I invite you to let the stories work on you and through you.<sup>1</sup>

Without the resurrection - without Easter - we wouldn't know about Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

If the story of Jesus had ended with his crucifixion -

he would probably have been forgotten - along with thousands executed by the Roman Empire.

There might have been a word or two about him in the writings of the historian Josephus

or in some Jewish rabbinic sources – but that would have been it.

And if there were no Easter – there would have been no Good Friday

because there would have been no community who followed him –

no friends who experienced him being there with them - after he was crucified -

no community to give meaning to what had happened -

no community to say –“hey – wait” – this is important.



So the story of the resurrection is central – but what is it?

What is it really about?

Let's remember that this was two thousand years ago.

People did write – they wrote stories on scrolls –

but they did not have the same standards of writing - that came later in history.

It was during the Enlightenment that people began to consider the literal nature of writing –

when people began to judge information as true or false.

But Mark – and all the gospels were written long before the Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

So – it's best not to try and apply these later standards to these early stories.

So what kind of stories are these?

I say they are most likely parables or metaphors?

Parable and metaphor are genres of writing that seek to find truth through story itself?



I started hearing these stories as a kid.

My parents took me to church as a little girl - a United Methodist for that matter.

I would have become a member of the church on Easter – probably.

I think I remember standing down front in a space much like this.

I would not have known anything about Mark's gospel being the earliest and the least complex.

I would not have known that its' ending is abrupt –  
so abrupt that someone else came later and added another ending.

No – I would have just heard that the stone was gone  
and Jesus was alive again – and I would have pondered  
what that could possibly mean.

I don't remember how much I thought about it.  
I was probably more interested in my new white patent leather shoes.

In the south you started wearing white at Easter.  
Clothes were important. I am glad they are not important now.  
Well – back to Mark and what he tells us about what happened.

The women were walking to the tomb that morning  
asking who would roll the stone away - so they could enter to anoint Jesus' body.

But when they arrived – the stone was already rolled away -  
and a young man told them that Jesus was gone.

He will be in Galilee – just like he said.  
They are afraid. That's it – end of gospel. They don't even tell anyone.

The other gospels add more information. They say the young man was an angel.

Matthew and Luke both added more to the ending.  
Matthew reports that the women left the tomb quickly  
frightened but with joy and ran to tell the disciples.

Luke wrote that the risen Jesus was seen in and around Jerusalem.



Somewhere along the way – I learned that it is important for some Christians  
to take the stories as factually true – that the factual accuracy is what makes it true.

I also learned that other Christians  
don't think the stories are true historically.  
Because of that - they may reject them as being of little importance.  
Or they may come to the conclusion that there is truth in the telling  
but are not sure where it is. But they still believe.

And – there are others who are simply curious – and just keep a sense of wonder -  
about what happened – an abiding belief that something significant happened.

And even after four years of graduate theological school –  
and over 20 years as a chaplain or pastor -  
I am part of this third group.

I really don't believe our creator acts outside the laws of the cosmos  
that we have discovered through science – the laws of physics and biology and anthropology –  
and those things Einstein spent his lifetime trying to explain.

I really cannot go any further with it than that.  
I just keep that abiding sense of wonder  
because I know what a difference it makes in my life.

But many people – even Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians,  
“If Christ has not been raised,  
then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.”

That is what Paul believed.

He was probably our first mystical writer in the New Testament.  
And Paul didn't even know Jesus when he was alive.

What that tells me is that there were a lot of people  
who experienced the presence of Jesus - after he was supposed to be dead.  
And they wrote about it – and we probably would too.



But the heart of it is this:  
Who is he to you – and what does he mean for your life?

Who is he to me – and what does he mean for my life?

Let's go back to the reading -  
thinking of the language of parable and metaphor  
because parable and metaphor often carry the bigger truths of our lives.

“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?”

What is the stone?

What is the tomb?

What's the rolling away?



On Thursday night Andrew and I participated in a Passover Seder.  
Many of you have been to a Seder. But if not – a Seder is the traditional Passover meal for Jews.  
What I learned at this Seder is that it can teach us about the rolling away of stones.

A Seder is a combination of readings that go along with certain symbolic foods.  
This *Haggadah* is the booklet used that we hold and read from during the meal.

This *Haggadah* used very current images and expressions.

Remember - the Seder is all about the Jews being free from slavery in Egypt -  
and how they were convinced that God carried them to freedom.

The word for Egypt - was Mitzriyim.

Mitzriyim actually means “narrow space.”

Can you say it? Mitzriyim

The words and music of the Seder are full of these images of God  
helping us move out of places that restrict us.

And it occurred to me -

Wouldn't that be like someone rolling away the stone – so we can be free?



So – here's the question.

Stones can be any number of things.

What kind of stones need to be rolled away – so that you are more alive?

*Rolling Stones* – based on Mark 16:1-8  
Aspen Community UMC  
April 12, 2009 – Easter Sunday

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Stones can be disappointment – grief - self-doubt – despair – addiction – fear – past mistakes.

What if we thought about these things as stones that need to be rolled away?

Things that constrict us – like being crowded in a narrow space.

Surely there are stones that need rolling away in your life.

If you want to live deeply and with vitality -

to be embraced by life – not scared of it –

do you need to push some stones away that hold you back?

Or as the language of the Seder gave us – let God help you through the narrow spaces.



So – what am I getting at?

I am encouraging you to let the story work on you.

And it doesn't just need to be Easter.

Maybe sometime during the year – when you get stuck in a narrow place -

when something is keeping you from being what you want -

stop by and say Pastor Jane – would you look with me at this story about rolling stones away

and see if it has something I need to realize?



And finally -

when the stone is rolled away - there is room for light to stream in.

Let's call that the light of resurrection.

Rolling stones – think of what in your life needs a bigger space to flourish.

Is it forgiveness you need? Is it confidence? Is it permission?

Those are stones to roll away - so that the light can stream in.

Light is able to stream into our lives when the stone – whatever the stone is - is rolled away.

Let's call it the divine energy – just like the screen you see.

Let's think of rolling the stone away - so we can be bathed in the light of resurrection.

We are bathed in the light of resurrection.

Say it. "I am bathed in the light of resurrection."



In closing – it's time to go -

and get about the business of rolling stones -  
and letting the light of resurrection shine in.

Think about what you are living with that needs to go the way of that stone  
that was rolled away from the tomb of Jesus.

Let the story work on you  
and make resurrection real for you this day.

And let the stone that rolled away - make new space for light to stream in -  
so you can be bathed in the light of resurrection.

Resurrection is not a one-time event that happened a long time ago.

Resurrection is not a collection of religious stories.

Resurrection is the nature of human life itself - when we are in touch with the spirit.

Happy Easter.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rex Hunt in "Sermons, Liturgies, Prayers, and Articles from a progressive/post-liberal theological perspective" for Easter 2009.

<sup>2</sup> This material and following is adapted from Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan in *The Last Week: A Day-By-Day Account of Jesus's final Week in Jerusalem*, p. 190.