

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DENTON

REV. JOHN BURTON

APRIL 24, 2011 – EASTER SUNDAY – 8:00 AM CONTEMPORARY SERVICE

SERMON: “ROLLING THE STONE AWAY”

TEXT: MARK 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” <sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” <sup>8</sup> So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## INTRODUCTION

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

- On Good Friday they crucified him, put him in a tomb, and rolled a huge bolder over the entrance.
- On Good Saturday his disciples huddled in the shadow of that bolder, in fear and doubt.
- But on Easter morning the stone was rolled back and Jesus was not there!

This morning, we come to peer back into time, to see the stone that was rolled aside, to see into an empty tomb, and to feel some of the shock and awe which the Disciples felt!

So, with Christians of every generation and place, we proclaim: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed.

I have this picture of Salome and the two Marys going from Kroger to Kroger, cleaning out each store’s spice isle of scores of those little bitty jars of Frankincense and Myrrh, which would have needed to prepare Jesus body for final entombment. Personally I picture Salome getting a bit testy with a manager about not being able to get funeral spices by the pound – those quarter ounce containers are such a rip off!

After leaving Kroger (or whatever spice store they used) the women headed for the tomb. They had one common question. It was not about their very uncertain futures. It was not about the danger inherent in what they were going to do? They were worried about who was going to roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb.

That must have been a very large stone to fully cover to entrance of the tomb – perhaps a thousand pound rock. It was designed NOT to be moved. So, even if the women had been lifting iron at LA Fitness for the past few years, in between parables and miracles, they would not have been able to move it by themselves. So if they could not find someone to roll the stone away, at the crack of dawn, then they would not be able to get in and apply the spices to Jesus' body.

We all have things that come between us and what we want in life. You can hear those stones rolling in on top of us whenever we hear:

Your boss say: "You're fired."

Your spouse asks for a divorce.

Your professor say: "You flunked."

One of your children says to you: "I hate you."

Or your doctor say: "It's terminal."

It's like the weight of the world has come down on top of you. It's what some psychologists call "a little death." The stone rolls on top of the door and you can't get out. Do you know what I'm talking about? It takes a lot of good friends and family to roll those stones away and call you back into the light and to laughter.

But there are other stones, stones that come between us and the relationship we want to have with Jesus Christ.

1. Some of those stones are made of up a lifetime's collection of sins.
2. Others are comprised of all our sins of omission – kind and just things we should have done.
3. And, of course, there is that ugly stone we call death, which stands between us and life eternal.

These stones are too big for us to roll away by ourselves. Too big even for all our friends to lift. And like Salome and the two Marys, we wonder who is going to roll those stones away for us.

Some people say that the angels came and rolled the stone away – as if Jesus needed help getting out of the tomb!

Do you think that is so? Do you think that the Son of God couldn't get the job done without outside help? If so, wouldn't that possibly diminish the power Jesus has to help us?

In my heart, I believe that the angels were standing on the outside of the stone, cheering, when that stone gave way to the immeasurable power of the Son of God!

That reminds me of a cartoon I once saw – A sleazy Hollywood agent is talking to Death, he says, “Death baby, you need to refocus – after that resurrection thing your work has lost its sting!”

Funny or not, I like the idea of a neutered Death!

Believing that Jesus rolled the stone away and in the process neutered death, I know that Jesus can roll the stone away from any tomb this world can make for us! I know that the Risen Lord can forgive sins, inspire justice, grant new beginnings, and even break the icy grip of death itself.

The resurrection story is not just about Jesus walking out of the darkness of the tomb on Easter morning. It is also about the hundreds of millions of believers who will also, one day, walk out of their graves, bathed in the very Light of the World, and say “thank you” to the one person who could roll the stone away for us.

Now let the Easter People say:  
Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen indeed!