

## “Why Are You Crying?”

John 20:1-18

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**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!** This is a powerful statement. What does this mean to you? My answer is simple: He lives!! This is the message of Easter and of hope for those who doubted Jesus was the Son of God, their Messiah. Our Easter service is a time to celebrate our Christian faith and Jesus’ resurrection. I am not talking about science facts, but I would like to share how this Easter story challenges us. Jesus’ death was serious. He didn’t pretend to be dead. As the Bible confirms, Jesus was completely dead, but he rose as a spiritual body. Believing Jesus’ resurrection in the flesh is important but that is not the whole story because there are many similar examples of resurrected bodies such as Lazarus return to life, the prophet Elijah prays for a young boy’s life in the Old Testament. Our Christian faith assures us that God is present always and we experience that Jesus Christ lives within our hearts. In our hymn, “He Lives”, the words remind us that he walks with us, talks with us along life’s narrow way. He lives! He Lives! Salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart. What does God want to tell us through this story? This morning, I want to invite all of us to see our story through the eyes of a woman, Mary, as we find the message of hope.

What happened to Mary? As our Scripture reads, “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that **the stone had been removed from the tomb.**<sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciples and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’” Mary was the first disciple and witness of Jesus’ resurrection, but at first, she couldn’t believe it. When she went to the tomb that early morning, she discovered that the stone already had been removed. I would like you to look at a picture of a Jewish tomb in Jesus’ time. I have been curious about the size of the stone that covered Jesus’ tomb.



In ancient Israel, and for the burial of Jesus' body, Israelites used a cave for the tomb. Typically, the cave's entrance was quite small and narrow, so a stone was used to cover the opening. This varied depending on the type of stone. It usually could weigh 1-2 tons (2000-4000 pounds). As we can imagine, this is quite heavy. As you see in the picture, the stone was set inside a groove in front of the entrance, and secured from falling over by a stone wall that stood in front of the tomb opening. In most cases, the groove was not level, but slightly sloped. In order to open the tomb, the stone would have to be rolled up the groove at an incline. It was not easy for a person to remove the stone.

In our church, we have a centering prayer gathering every Thursday morning at 11:00 a.m. at the library. We comfortably sit with our eyes closed and choose a sacred word that best supports our intent to be in the Lord's presence and we open to God's divine action within us. One person shared her experience of prayer with us. She picked a word, *faith*, and while she was meditating, she pictured a 'big rock' as a stumbling block standing in her way. It was too heavy for her to remove it for herself. To me, this image of a big rock perfectly overlaps the picture of the stone of Jesus' tomb. The stone that covered Jesus' tomb is a spiritual metaphor of both the barrier keeping Jesus from resurrection, and also our life's challenges. When Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, the stone had already been removed because Jesus had risen! As she wept, Jesus appeared to her and said, "Woman, why are you weeping? Why are you crying? Don't cry. I am ascending to my father and your father!" Surprised and joyful, Mary announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

Here is the stone as a part of our Easter decoration. What does this stone symbolize in your story of life? We experience crisis, distress, and the great sadness of loss in our life's journey. Some of us are suffering from health issues, financial difficulties, and broken relationships. Some of us are grieving over the loss of loved ones, seeking comfort but cannot find it. Some of us are struggling with low self-esteem or inadequate feelings about ourselves. The feelings of despair and depression always threaten our souls and weaken our will, and leave us helpless and hopeless. We wish to remove this heavy stone of our burden, but we don't have strength to roll it away. Like Mary, who was weeping outside the tomb, we often realize that life is not easy, but full of stumbles and difficulties. Sometimes we feel that we are at a dead end, with no exit. We cry for God's help.

But God is able and God will remove our burdens as He removed the stone from the tomb and resurrected Jesus from death. God is able to turn our sorrow to joy, worries and despair to hope and he will transform our doubt into assurance if we have faith in Christ. The resurrection shows us the power of darkness and death cannot dominate us because God is stronger than death. This is the message of hope that we find in the story of Jesus' resurrection. Amen.