

Shake Rattle and Roll

Sterling UMC
April 24, 2011 (Sunrise)
Matthew 28:1-28:10

Can I ask you a question this morning? Why are you here? Why in the world would you get up out of a warm bed at this ungodly hour and come out here and sit in the damp morning air? I mean do you all know what time it is? It's 6:30 AM! And it's a Sunday morning for crying out loud! This is the one day of the week you have to sleep in? What are you doing here this morning? You should be at home in your pajamas, sipping a cup of coffee and reading the morning paper. But you're not. Why not? There are so many others things you could be doing right now, but instead you chose to be here. Why?

There can only be one reason, only one explanation. Something incredible has happened! Something so amazing, so miraculous, so extraordinary that you cannot help but be here! Something literally earth-shattering has occurred. Yes, on that first Easter Sunday two thousand years ago, early in the morning just like this, it was literally shake, rattle, and roll. The earth shook, the tomb rattled, and the stone was rolled away. And with that our crucified Savior became our Risen Lord. Jesus Christ emerged from the grave. He is alive! He broke the chains of sin and death and rose victorious from the grave! And we you here today to bear witness to that fact. You are here today to remember and celebrate once again that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

If only it had been that way for the women on that first Easter morning. It was dark as they arose that Sunday morning... The two got up and put on their garments grabbed their spices and headed out on the dirt road that lead out of the city.

As they headed out on the road and as the sun began to rise the path was lined with many dark shadows... but no shadow or darkness could compare with the darkness that hovered over their soul.

As they walked up the path towards the tomb... thoughts and sights of the last week -- ripped through their minds like violent tornados..

They had been there when Jesus rode in on the colt before thousands shouting his praises, what an incredible moment that was. But unfortunately their minds and the events of last week didn't stop there.

Try as they might they couldn't stop those other thoughts, those terrible scenes from playing out again and again in their minds.

They saw Jesus tied to a post a Roman scourge ripping across His back. As they recalled the purple robe -- the beatings, the cruel mocking and the crown of thorns, the

tears began to flow again.

They had seen it all -- they had seen Jesus, their teacher, their friend, their Lord, they had witnessed everything that Jesus went through...

And these 2 women, these two Mary's (Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James) were there at the cross...

They saw Jesus hanging there on that rough cross of wood... they saw His body struggle and wince with pain with every breathe that he took...

They were there when Jesus cried out, " MY GOD MY GOD WHY HAS THOUGH FORSAKEN ME" -- and they saw his head fall as he cried, "IT IS FINISHED."

They where there when Jesus died, and when he died they died to.. O' they were still alive physically but their hopes and joy died on that cross with Jesus, on that dark Friday ... Their Lord was dead... And their hope was gone.

So what are they doing up so early on this Sunday morning? Why aren't they lying in bed wallowing in their misery... What was it that drove them from their beds before dawn, and put them on this dark uphill climb?

The thing that drove them, was their love for and devotion to Jesus -- someone had to prepare the body for burial and no one else had volunteered; Peter didn't, James didn't, neither did John -- So it was up to these 2 faithful followers, 2 women who had never left the side of Jesus, who were with Him until the end -- it was up to them to do it, and they did..

And as they were nearing the tomb that's when it happened. Shake, Rattle and Roll!!! Suddenly the ground shook. The tomb rattled. And the stone was rolled away.

An angel of the Lord appeared before them. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes were as white as snow. This must have been quite a sight because the guards who had been stationed nearby to guard the tomb shook and fell out like dead men. Then the angel spoke to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where his body laid. Then go quickly and tell his disciples and Peter, "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see him."

And so the women filled with fear and joy turned hurried away from the tomb. And when they did suddenly Jesus met them. The risen Christ stood before them and they fell at his feet and worshipped him.

Today some of us are like those women going to the tomb. They wondered: "Who will roll away the stone for us?" We wonder how we're going to deal with the problems we face.

What stands between you and Jesus? You and freedom? You and new life? You see on that Easter morning the women were trying to get into a tomb. A lot of us are trying to get out of one. We feel trapped in tombs of our own making or buried alive under pressures we never asked for (but may have brought on ourselves). What does the stone you face look like?

Is it a pile of bills?

Is it marital trouble?

Is it a child who's heading the wrong way?

Is it an illness?

Is it depression or anxiety?

Is it guilt that won't go away?

Is it pride that says, 'I don't need God'?

When life piles it on, when we get one disappointment after another, we ask, "Who will roll away the stone?" "How am I going to get through this, out of this, over this—whatever "this" is?"

Not every stone looks like a stone, of course. And not every tomb looks like a tomb.

And I believe that is why you are here this morning! Because this day as you look up in faith something happens. Shake, rattle and roll! The earth shakes, your tomb rattles and your stone is rolled away. You see the good news today is that the Easter story isn't over: God still moves stones.

It's not clear from the Bible exactly how the stone sealing Jesus' tomb was removed. Perhaps it was that mysterious young man in white who was sitting in the tomb when the women arrived. Maybe it was the earthquake that Matthew tells us about. But one thing you can be sure of it wasn't an accident. God was behind it all the way. And for us it is the same way.

Sometimes God rolls the stone away himself. More often God sends help in human form.

Sometimes God gives us strength to move it ourselves. More often God works with us to chip away at the stone, one prayer at a time.

Sometimes the stone rolls away all at once. More often it recedes gradually.

Sometimes the Lord gives us faith to move mountains. More often he gives us a shovel.

But if God wants that stone removed, one way or another the rock is going to roll.

I believe that's why you are here this morning. Because within this crowd there are stories, dozens of them I'm sure, of amazing recoveries from sicknesses, cancers, phobias, addictions, grief, debt, and divorce. Little resurrections all around us, each one reminding us of the great resurrection that started it all long ago. Each one reminding us of that first Easter when shake, rattle and roll, our Lord conquered death and along with it every problem, burden, and sin we face. Each one reminding us that God still moves stones.

Friends Easter reminds us that there is no stone too large, no tomb too cold, no hell too dark that God can't move it, warm it, or light it. With a shake, rattle and roll, the One who made the mountains is still moving them, bringing us hope, freedom, and everlasting life. Amen.