

Sunrise Worship: A Rock 'n' Roll Easter Mark 16:1-8  
Appalachian Power Park, Charleston, WV Easter Sunday (April 5,) 2015

<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, 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> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup> And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

In the sermon today, I am going to repeat some of the liturgy that we have already spoken, yea shouted, as we do each Easter. So when I say **Christ is risen!** I want you to shout out: **Risen indeed! Alleluia!** This means you will have to stay awake and pay attention.

Mrs. Brown, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade talented and gifted teacher, decided to put on a passion play at the school. There would be six performances with different grades attending each performance. In this way the 8<sup>th</sup> graders would learn the whole passion narrative, by doing, and the whole school, by seeing.

But there were more 8<sup>th</sup> graders than there were parts, so Mrs. Brown decided to wax creative. She had students playing people and objects in the narrative. e.g. there were parts for the tree from which Judas hanged himself, the broken vase of perfume, five students simulating an earthquake, bystanders, and more bystanders and more bystanders.

She even had one lad playing the part of the great big ROCK that sealed the tomb, where Jesus laid. It was type casting. John was a large lad who had taken an early growth spurt. When he bent his legs and waist and grabbed his ankles with his hands, he looked pretty much round, like a big ROCK. She cast a wee tiny lass to be an angel to roll the stone away. The contrast, Mrs. Brown thought, was absolutely biblical.

The first performance was for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. It moved along pretty much according to plan until the tiny Angel of the Lord came out and using just one tiny finger she touched the ROCK. He somersaulted away from the entrance to the tomb, while managing to stay curled up.

The audience went wild! They cheered and chanted, "**ROCK! ROCK! ROCK!**" Afterwards they swarmed around him for autographs. He modestly signed simply, "THE ROCK."

It happened again much the same way, after the performance for the fourth grade audience. A star had been born.

But Mrs. Brown was not sure that all this attention was good for THE ROCK. So she took him aside and said that perhaps in the next performance, she would have him play the part of the Tree from which Judas hanged himself. Perhaps, someone else should also have a chance to be THE ROCK.

He did not agree. ***“But I LIKE being THE ROCK,”*** he said.

Teacher asked him, ***“Why?”***

***“Because I like letting Christ out of the tomb,”*** he replied.

***“But, John,”*** Mrs. Brown replied, ***“The rock isn’t rolled back for Jesus to be released. Christ was already arisen. The rock was rolled back so that the women could see.”***

John was taken aback. His confused face said it all. Then he asked the teacher, ***“Well, how did Jesus get out if the rock was still stuck in the hole.”***

Now, the teacher was taken aback. It was one of those moments teachers despise, when the question rebounds back to them and they don’t have a good answer. But before she could work through the momentary lapse to come up with some kind of answer, John answered his own question, ***“Well, I guess big rocks are no big thing for God.”***

Thus, did THE ROCK *roll back the boulder from his own mind and see into the empty darkness of the Easter Revelation and Mystery.* Mrs. Brown, in a subdued voice, choking back some sort of thing that the spring pollen must have caused, ***told John that she thought maybe he should continue in the role of THE ROCK, after all.***<sup>1</sup>

In today’s Gospel lesson, we heard of two Mary’s and a Salome coming to the tomb in the early morning following the Passover. We are told of what they are carrying in their hands – spices they bought for the customary treatment of a dead body. But we are not told of what they carry in their hearts.

Was it love, respect, duty?

But they also came with a question in their minds – how could they accomplish their mission, with that big rock in the way. Soon, they would be shocked to find out that ***“Well, I guess big rocks are no big thing for God.”***

Then there appears someone in the Mark telling of the Easter morning Resurrection announcement who does not appear in any of the other Gospels. There was this “**young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe.**”

Now, I grant you that for a long time, I thought of him as, I suspect, most people do – an angel. That might be in part because he says to the women what it seems like angels tell people they encounter in the Bible, all the time: “**Don’t be afraid; Don’t be alarmed.**”

HOWEVER, when I looked in the Gospels, I don’t find any sort of hesitancy for Matthew, Mark, Luke or John to call a spade a spade – or at least an angel an angel. Matthew does it 19 times; Mark 5 times; Luke 24 times, and John 3 times.

Not so here – this is described as merely a “**young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe.**” And, as I mentioned before – only Mark’s Gospel mentions him.

Mark also is alone among the Gospels in mentioning a young man in the Garden of Gethsemane:

**<sup>51</sup> And a young man followed [Jesus], with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And [one of the crowd with swords and clubs] seized him, <sup>52</sup> but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.**

It is this reference by Mark alone that leads many Bible scholars to believe that this is autobiographical; the naked fellow running out of the Garden of Gethsemane was Mark, the author of the Gospel, these scholars suppose.

Well, I think he found his clothes – not the linen cloth, but a white robe.

He ran away in fear, and if the first to recover in the resurrection – finding clothes, a miracle, and the Good News to proclaim: **Christ is risen! Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

The actual words that this young man (whom I believe is Mark) speaks to the women are this:

**“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”**

AND

These are the very last words quoted in the whole Gospel of Mark.

After he says, in essence, **Christ is risen! Risen indeed! Alleluia!** He tells them, in essence:

**Get rolling!**

**Go tell others that Jesus – who overcame and conquered death, is going on to Galilee before you. Just like He said. Get rolling!**

- You see, Easter **does not merely change us**; it **changes what we are to do**.
- Easter does not just **overcome and conquer death and give us life** – which it does – but it also **changes what we are to do**.

**Where is YOUR Galilee?**

**With whom are you supposed to share good news and to call to Galilee?**

I read a story in this past Thursday’s *Charleston Daily Mail*:

Anna Faye Ray, 77, was 66 when she was given another chance at life thanks to the unselfish gift of two kidneys from a family who lost a 2-year-old child.

In 1971 she was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease, a potentially fatal condition she inherited from her father. She tried medication to slow down the disease, but it continued to progress.

At 9 p.m. Feb. 15, 2004 at Charleston Area Medical Center’s General Division Anna received a transplant. When her pastor came to pray with her before the operation, she told him she was not afraid because she would be fine whether she continued life on earth or in heaven. Today, with medications, her new kidneys, they have remained healthy and continue to grow.

[Today, Angela Ray says:] “I’ll do everything I can to take care of my body so a part of their child will continue to live.”

Her life was saved **thanks to a family she may never know because the entire process is confidential.** However, she thinks of that family often and strives to do what she can to help others by working hard as an advocate for organ donation. **Prior to the surgery, she was very shy but has forced herself to become an extrovert in order to be a good speaker.**

Anna Faye's life was not only changed; what she believes she is supposed to do has also changed. She had to force herself to become an extrovert to accomplish this new mission given with her new kidneys.

**The Victory we celebrate, and the new mission we are given, is not from some anonymous victim of a car accident.**

The Victory we celebrate, and the new mission we are given, is from a loving, all powerful God, given through an obedient, loving Son. For you. For me.

It's actually OK if, like the two Mary's and Salome, this news is so real that it's a little bit frightening, and you are a little bit quiet **for awhile.**

**Actually THAT is a lot more real than simply wearing new clothes, singing the Hallelujah Chorus, watching the children Easter Egg hunt, eating pickled eggs, and watching basketball, like nothing is really new at all.**

We know after a time of silence, that they DID get over their fear and their silence, because that good news has been shared over these centuries all the way to us. Yes, they got over it. They did what they were told.

Not only was their life changed; so was their mission.

- **“Well, I guess big rocks are no big thing for God.”**
- Sooooo **Get rolling!**
- **Go tell others that Jesus – who overcame and conquered death, is going on to Galilee before you. Just like He said.**

**Christ is risen! Risen indeed! Alleluia!** In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from John Shea, *Following love Into Mystery: Feasts, Funerals, Weddings-The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) pp. 150-52