

May I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first rector I worked with was called John. He was into bodybuilding and once dyed his hair and beard purple in Lent. He was great guy, did much to shape my ministry. And before I gave my first ever Easter sermon, he took me to one side and he said this: "Keep it simple. Don't try to be clever. No gimmicks. Just tell the story as it is."

So, in the spirit of John's advice, I want to keep it simple. I want to offer you a simple who, what, why, of the large stone that features at the heart of our Easter story. The who question actually features in our text. It was asked by the women, who went to the tomb early in the morning to anoint Jesus' body. As they walked along, they said to one another, "Who will roll the stone away?" That was a very good question to ask. Perhaps they should have asked it of themselves before they set out in the morning. If they had, maybe they'd have taken a crowbar as well as the spices to anoint the body, or at least some extra muscle.

Of course, in the end, when they got there, they didn't need a crowbar. They didn't need the spices, either, for that matter, because the body was gone and the stone was rolled away. But the question of by whom still stands. Mark, the gospel writer, doesn't say. I think it's fair to say we're invited to assume that God was behind it. And if it was, I think it's interesting to note that God acted quietly. Silently. In the middle of the night, as He raised Jesus from the dead.

There was no fanfare. No deafening thunder. No witnesses. Nobody saw God at work. Isn't that amazing? God works the most significant act in human history and he did it in the dark when there was no one around. God raised Jesus from the dead. He rolled the stone away. He left the tomb empty, and nobody noticed. He left it all for someone to discover. He worked a wonder and left the tomb for all to see what He had done.

We don't know how he did it. We don't know who he used to do it. And I for one am happy to leave those questioned unanswered. As the empty tomb

is not there to be explained, the empty tomb is not a problem to be solved. It's a wonder and a mystery to be experienced.

The second question I want to ask is the what. What effect did the fact that the stone had rolled away have on the women who found it? Did it make them happy? Did they rejoice? Absolutely not. We're told they entered the tomb, saw a young man in a white robe, and it says they were alarmed. I've been struck this year, every year this story, we hear it, something about it always strikes one as fresh and new. And this year, I've been struck by the fact that the resurrection story has such an unpromising beginning.

Jesus has been raised, the stone has been rolled away, and the only witnesses are terrified. The story ends with them running away from the scene, and this is how the book ends, for they were afraid. Not only were the witnesses scared, they were scared women, and women at the time weren't allowed to be witnesses. Their testimony wasn't admissible in court. And yet, and yet the story with such an unpromising beginning changes the course of human history. The disciples came to realize the wonderful truth: that Jesus had been raised from the dead, that death had been defeated, that evil was overcome.

A story that begins in the dark, ends in glorious light. I was catching a trolley on Thursday, down at 12th and Imperial. And I'd just missed a train. So, I had to wait there for the next train, and I got so bored, because they don't come that frequently, I was kicking my heels and I started to read all the signs on the platform. And there was one opposite me that said, "No loitering." The thought crossed my mind, was I breaking that rule, as I hung around on the platform?

I don't think so. I wasn't loitering. I was waiting. Waiting for the train, which I thought, one hoped, was about to come. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope. It speaks of a bright and glorious future. Jesus, who endured the cross and shame was raised to new life at the right hand of God. He blazed a new trail, a new and living way, right into

the right hand of God, to his very presence and invites us to follow him in that way.

We too will be familiar with pain and suffering, but we could know that evil will triumph, the bonds of evil and death have been broken. We are the Easter people: full of the hope and promise of new life. We are not wanderers in this world. We are pilgrims. We know where we are heading. We know the end of the story. We live with the end in mind.

We have no need to drift through life. We are not called to loiter. We're called to wait expectantly for that glorious life which will one day be revealed. We live our lives in the light of the glorious resurrection hope of the life which is to come. We wait in hope.

Finally, why? Why was the stone rolled away? I ask that because we know from other Easter stories that Jesus, after his resurrection, could pass through walls. We could assume that after he was raised from the dead, he didn't need the stone rolled away in order to escape the tomb. Which is why I think the stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the disciples look in.

The four Gospels have four very different resurrection stories and accounts, but they all agree, they all begin, with the account of the stone being rolled away and the disciples looking in the tomb. The empty tomb is still there for us, his disciples, to discover.

It wasn't open to let Jesus out. It was open to let us in. In Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, one of the characters explains his excitement about how recently-discovered chaos theory has thrown the world of science into confusion. It promises, he thinks, a radical transformation of how the world is understood and turns everything upside down. He says this: "It makes me so happy to be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. The future is disorder, a door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong."

A door has cracked open. That's the Easter message. That's how we're invited to understand the resurrection.

As I close, I'm aware, I haven't answered all the questions about the stone being rolled away in the empty tomb. I haven't sought to prove that the stone was rolled away. My purpose is to invite us to look again, this Easter morning, inside the empty tomb as if for the first time. And see that empty tomb as a place of wonder and challenge.

The empty tomb is a place where new life begins for us. A door has cracked open. And we're invited to step through into a whole new realm of experience, a whole new way of understanding the world. Nothing will ever be the same again.

Christ is risen!