

# *He Still Moves Stones*

**An Easter Message Offered by  
Jeffrey W. Gibelius, Pastor  
Second Presbyterian Church,  
Carlisle, Pennsylvania**

**April 4, 2010**

*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. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 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. 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." 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.*

*Mark 16:1-8 NRSV*

People react to the death of someone they care about in many ways. One surprisingly universal way is to get busy. We call friends and family with the sad news. We cook. We clean. We start planning the funeral. The women of Easter morning were no different. When Jesus died they wanted to do something, *anything*, to lessen their pain and show their respect and devotion for the man they loved.

They got an early start. As soon as the shops opened on Sunday morning, they bought spices to finish the job of preparing Jesus' body for burial. Joseph of Arimathea had just enough time before the Sabbath began on Good Friday to quickly wrap Jesus in a shroud, but likely not enough time to do everything required for a proper First Century Jewish burial. Imagine the women talking, early on Sunday morning, hearts broken, as they made their way to the tomb: "Do we have everything?" "Shroud, oil,

spices.” And then it would have occurred to one or both of them: “Oh no, who’s going to roll away the stone for us?” Sometimes the smallest details can become overwhelming obstacles, especially when we’re grieving.

They weren’t being irrational. The stone they worried about was a disc-shaped rock, about a foot thick, and maybe four or five feet in diameter. Weighing perhaps two tons or more, it was seated in a track or channel slightly uphill from an empty tomb’s entrance; a small wedge-shaped chock stone kept the large one in place. Once the body was placed in a tomb, however, the small stone would be removed and the large one would roll down into place by the force of gravity, effectively closing and sealing off the tomb. It would require several people, perhaps with levers and pulleys, to roll away the stone once it was in place. The women faced a real problem.

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? 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. Visit some of the bigger older cemeteries around any big city and you’ll see some pretty fancy family mausoleums; they look like

miniature houses. And if you drive through some of the suburbs around those cities you'll see some pretty fancy family homes, very impressive. Truth is, though, some of those houses aren't much different from really big tombs. There's no real life there. No love. No passion. People are trapped there and they don't know it.

I remember a faithful guy in one of my congregations. He was an Elder, Deacon, and leader of the prayer ministry: loved and respected by everyone. On the outside everything looked good, but behind the scenes he was really struggling emotionally, financially, and spiritually. He felt completely trapped. That's when he confided to me, "I know a light is on somewhere, Jeff, but right now I think my back is to it, and all I see is shadows." That's what it's like in the tomb: only shadows and darkness.

What do you see from where you stand this Easter morning? Shadows, darkness and stones -- or light and new life? Whatever tomb you live in, whatever stone that's holding you back this today, God has good news for you. 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's Gospel tells us about. But sometime between Good Friday evening and Easter morning it moved. You can be sure that it wasn't an accident. God was behind it all the 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*. [Jim Fleming].

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

A while back I asked some friends for stories of modern day resurrections. One woman wrote to me of her cousin.

*His parents split up when he was about two and a half, and he took it really hard. Then he and his mother went to live with his grandmother. Just before he was drafted and shipped to Viet Nam, his grandmother died. While fixing a machine gun, it blew up in his arms and he suffered a terrible head injury. When he got back from the war, both his mother and uncle died, two marriages failed, and he realized he had a drinking problem.*

Talk about a tomb! This guy's life was one bad thing after another. I bet you know someone like him.

But then this guy started going to AA, and he learned about a Higher Power, and he stopped drinking, and one by one he started dealing with all the other stones that had been keeping him from a healthy life. God still moves stones.

Another woman told me about the death of her sister—the second sister she had lost to illness at a very young age--and how God worked to heal her family and renew their faith. They discovered the tumor when Lori was just twenty years old. A variety of medical procedures allowed her to lead an otherwise normal life: Lori married, had two kids, and became a nurse. But then the tumor started growing again. Two years later Lori was gone at the age of 46.

Her sister, the one who told me this story, told me of signs she believes God sent to bring them hope: a stunning image of a cross created by the sun's light shining through an otherwise ordinary door, a double-rainbow on the day of her memorial service, and other unusual incidents that were either eerie coincidence or the hand of God reaching out to them, reassuring them that Lori was more alive now than ever before. My friend was almost embarrassed to tell me about these signs—she was afraid that I might think she was strange. But then I reminded her that we believe in a God who moves stones and raises people from the dead; these signs didn't seem so strange to me.

Within this crowd there are stories, dozens of them I'm sure, of amazing recoveries from blood disorders and cancers, phobias, and 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 that God still moves stones.

But some of you aren't sure. You're contemplating what seems to be the biggest stone of all. It's like the Great Wall of China, that stone separating you from God. It might be called grief. It might be called fear. It might be called sin. It's so big and so heavy that you wonder if you will ever see God face to face, eye to eye. Could God really love you, knowing all that you have done and thought? Will God really help you, knowing how many times you've tried to change and failed? Is Easter about chocolate bunnies and marshmallow Peeps and meant especially for kids, or is it about empty tombs and new life for everyone?

I don't think we can answer these questions until we put ourselves on the line for Christ. Until, like the women of Easter morning, we commit ourselves to doing whatever we can to seeing him face to face. It's one thing to know in our heads that "nothing can separate us from the love of God." [Romans 8] It's quite another thing to determine that we will not allow anything to separate us from that love. We all need to have the attitude that 'no stone is going to get in between me and Jesus.' There's just too much at stake.

Do you remember NBC television news reporter David Bloom? He was the guy who died while covering the war in Iraq as an embedded correspondent. What many of us who appreciated his enthusiastic reporting and warm sense of humor didn't know about him was that David Bloom was a deeply committed Christian. For years he had been kind of a Christmas and Easter Christian—if you know what I mean—until two years earlier when he joined a great Bible study at his church.

Think about that for a moment. What's a guy like that going to Bible Study for? What could he possibly be looking for? At age thirty-nine, Bloom was a rising star. Former White House correspondent, weekend host of the Today show, lots of money, fame, and influence. But he wanted something more. He saw that everything he had was nothing more than a fancy tomb--without God. On the night before he died of a pulmonary embolism, Bloom sent his wife, Melanie, an e-mail:

*I hope and pray all my guys [in the unit] get out of this in one piece, but I'll tell you, Mel, I am at peace. Here I am, supposedly at the peak of professional success, but I could, frankly, care less. It's nothing compared to my relationship with you and the girls and Jesus.... When the moment comes in my life when you are talking about my last day, I am determined that you and others will say, 'He was devoted to his wife and children; he was admired; he gave every ounce of his being for those whom he cared most about—not himself, but God and his family.'"*

[Compiled from reports in Newsmax.com. and Breakpoint.org]

Which is worse? To die young on top of the world, knowing that death is gain, or to live never knowing that you're not really living at all? God still moves stones, just in time for us to find Jesus, the risen Christ, behind them.

But God doesn't move every stone. In our lifetimes some illnesses don't heal and some hearts stay broken. I don't know why. But if, like the women, we are willing to meet Jesus in his tomb, then Jesus will surely be with us in ours. And if God the Father freed Jesus his Son from the tomb, then at the last day he will raise us who call Jesus our brother.

Mark tells us that when the women got to the tomb, "they looked up, and saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away." I think many of us will find that, if we would just dare to approach Jesus many of the stones in our life would be rolled away, too. Coming to this table, and receiving Jesus' own body and blood in the Lord's Supper, is a great first step.

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. The One who made the mountains is still moving them, bringing us hope, freedom, and everlasting life. Amen.

The title for this sermon comes from a book by Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*.

*Dear Friend,*

*I hope you have been blessed by this message. You can request a free audio-tape or CD recording of this sermon by contacting the church office. We also have a complete sermon archive (including audio-files and PDFs) on-line at [GrowWithSecond.org/sermons](http://GrowWithSecond.org/sermons)*

*Second Presbyterian Church is a thriving congregation celebrating over 175 years of service to God and God's people. It would be our joy to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. Please consider being our guest for Sunday worship at 8 or 10:30am. Children's Church and infant and toddler care are always provided.*

*Jeff Gibelius, Pastor*

***Second Presbyterian Church***

*528 Garland Dr.*

*Carlisle, PA 17013*

*[GrowWithSecond.org](http://GrowWithSecond.org)*

*717-243-4571*

© 2010 Jeffrey Gibelius

This sermon is intended for personal use and distribution. If you want to use it for anything else, I'd be honored. Just call for permission. No claims of absolute originality are made for this material. As one man said, "I churn my own butter, but I use milk from other men's cows."