

Rolling Back the Stone
Pastor Laura Hehner
3-31-13 (Easter Sunday)

God is good.

God is actually marvelous before our eyes.

Too big to see all the way.

---The very life within us, giving us the power to move each foot forward.

God is the breath now drawing in and out of your nose and mouth and filling your chest,
and moving back out.

---The consciousness of the thoughts right now moving through our minds,
as we sit here, in this place, and talk, and listen.

God is all things... and in being that,

There is nothing we can say specifically---ever—

---that can fully describe this holy presence---

---this holy support, and sustenance, and Life of the All surrounding us,

Because there is *everything* to say.

And that's why there is this day.

Not just the daytime around us, now...

... but this day of realizing resurrection.

This is the day the Lord has made...

Rejoice and be glad in it...

..because life changes constantly.

Moving us always from one new moment, to the next.

The good and the bad.

---*Now*, in these days, when we see the same face in the mirror, subtly changing,

and *later*, past all of this *stuff*—all of this bone a skin and smile---

---into times we can't yet see, through the holy fullness of eternity.

Today, this Easter Sunday, we sit and we stand,

and we raise our voices together for God,

to remember that we live. That we die. And that we live again.

In this constant change. ...Over and over.

Transforming from one thing to another forever,

as tiny bits of God's holy, moving soul.

Now, all of that might sound pretty broad.

Because it is. It's broad because God is broad.

So to bring us back down to earth, a little closer...

...Today, this Easter Sunday, we're here to think about what happened this morning

that the disciples—those male *and* female followers together---

---went to Jesus' tomb, and found wadded up cloth tossed in the corner,

and strewn across the burial slab, like sheets and pajamas thrown to the side after sleep.

And to pull us closer in *still*,

...we're here this Easter Sunday to talk about *us*.

Each of us sitting together right here, in *this* room.

It feels so good to be back, doesn't it?

I know I said it before, but I had to say it again,

because I feel a *lot* of joy being together in this space again.

Feels so good, coming back to our sanctuary

from that temporary space we've been sitting in upstairs.

Now, this room... this temple... it's not completely returned to its full way, yet.

Probably pretty obvious.

Our chairs are all stacked up.

Everything from our Sunday School room is piled up and out of order, back there.

Our staircase is splattered with paint and pieces from the new work being done...

... our repaired walls are still bare, in their fresh coat of paint, waiting to be decorated...

The carpet is still the same carpet that was soaked in two inches of water down here,

---Rippled and frayed and faded.

For anybody who doesn't know, this place... this house of God...

... was nearly destroyed in January.

In the subzero temperatures, our pipes burst and flooded the sanctuary---

---and up further, the Sunday School room, too.

Worse, our church came way too close to actually catching on *fire*, afterward...

...because of our old wiring set-up, and the fact that water

was hazardously rushing through our electrical box, past all of that.

This temple came so very close to being gone from us for good.

Since then, Mike and Kim, and Z, and Ron and Lois, and Lori, and Dave,
and just our whole congregation together,

Have been putting so much into this place to bring it back from where it was.

Whether it was through working with hands,

or donating much needed and appreciated funds,

or calling people to set up times and help to reconstruct...

The words "thank you" can't describe the gratitude we share together

for all of the love, and time, and stress,

and strain so many have put into returning this place to us.

...This sanctuary is still in the process of becoming something *new*...

...though it's not completely ready to return, yet.

Over the next few days, we'll be arranging for that new carpet to be put in,

And then everything will be moved back into place,

and settled again, as something new, and fresh.

---Something that will show so beautifully all of the love

this congregation shares with each other in God.

...But I wanted us to gather together down here, today, anyway.

I hoped *this* would be the place the body of this church came back together, this morning.

I wanted for us to be here, in this space together, on this Easter Sunday...

...because this room... this temple... this sanctuary...

In so many ways, is a symbol---a sign---of that beautiful thing
we came here to celebrate with each other.

This is a place of resurrection.

---Of fresh things and new hours coming after rough times
and the loss of the old and familiar.

While I was down here with Ron and Lois,
and their grandson, Danny, and Karen, on Good Friday,
getting this place ready for us to worship,

I was grabbing all of the battered things lying around---
---bent and broken boxes, scattered decorations---
---to stack up back there, and I found these long strips of linen.

I spread those strips out to cover and put away the piled parts of our church,
And something hit me.

---Something stopped me, and I had to take a second to let myself just think and stare,
...As a different, but very similar moment filled my mind.

Does the same moment fill you?

Laying that linen over the broken parts of our church, that Good Friday...

---Just those three days before the morning we call Easter--- this morning---

I couldn't help but think about the body of Christ.

Not just us, as a *church*, but the *actual* body of Jesus---

---About as mistreated---about as broken---as a body can be.

And that *linen*---the same, but different---

--being laid over that body as he was put away and buried.

And, strangely enough, I was draping those battered things
with the cloth in my hands, right around the exact same time of day,
that all of those amazingly important things actually happened.

We came together down here at 3:30 on Good Friday.

The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus died around 3pm.

Not too long after, they took Jesus down from where he was killed,
and Joseph of Arimathea, covered him in linen to be buried.

It was just around that exact same time that Joseph grabbed, and moved, and placed
the body that would be foundation of the church---*your* church—

And every other church that would ever be built---and in regret, and pain,
covered those broken pieces in just the same way,

Pulling us closer in still, to where we are---each one of us---

as I picked up these scattered pieces, and covered them with linen,

I couldn't help but think of the shambles of our own lives we so often find scattered around us.

Those broken pieces of ourselves we so often try to hide and forget.

Those fragmented pieces of ourselves, after we're hit hard with a bad moment.

That leave us feeling sloppily spread out, and unable put things together in our minds enough to think clearly about where to go, and what to do next.

How often do we feel this?

So many times.

So many times everything we know of ourselves is taken apart.

And we're left with only the remains of what was,

As we move without clear sight into the future.

I know that might sound a bit dismal, but we know this is certainly true.

Life is beautiful, but it ain't always pretty.

And the disciples knew this to be true this morning, themselves.

Their teacher had just been killed. They were in hiding.

Everything they knew, everything they had done, had been destroyed in a matter of hours.

And they didn't know where to go.

From our scripture reading today...

The first verse of John chapter 20 describes Mary walking to the tomb,

“while it was still dark.”

It's a subtle line, but like all details in the bible,

I think is important to pay attention to.

Especially in the gospel of John.

There's so much symbolism used in this gospel
to describe the impact of the moments and truths
experienced by the disciples at Jesus' side.

In the *dark*, Mary Magdalene moved to the tomb, with sadness. Misery. Weeping....
...Through an hour when it was difficult to see ahead, difficult to see where she stood.

And we've all stood in that place. We've all been there,
in those sightless moments of heartache, and despair.

But it was also the *morning*. The beginning of a new day.

This is important to pay attention to as well.

This moment didn't take place at night.

This darkness didn't surround her at the end of a long day,

But at the beginning.

We know what happens next. She goes, and sees Jesus is gone.

Her guide, her teacher, wasn't even there to *mourn* over,

And this sends her into an even more frantic state.

Lost and alone, she thinks Jesus---her Lord---has been stolen from her,
even in this hour of her despair.

And haven't we felt that way too. In those times when we're most taken apart,

We fear the absence of God in our lives.

We fear silence. Emptiness.

And we become consumed by a sense of isolation.

And it's that very feeling that we *remember* in ourselves, today.

And the moments after, that we're here in this still partly tattered,

but freshly returning room to *celebrate* together this morning.

As she's crumpled in her grief, God speaks out to her.

Calls her. Asks her why she's weeping.

The text in John describes this voice of God as coming through angels.

---People standing suddenly near.

And Mary cries out to them about her misery, and what's happened,

and just as she turns to walk away,

She shockingly finds what she's been looking for---her guide.

Her teacher. Her Lord. Right there, in front of her.

She's unable to recognize him, at first.

Because something is different.

Something is new.

Something is changed.

But it doesn't take too long to realize that this fresh face she sees before her eyes.

--This transformed person--is the one and very same she'd walked with, and lived for,

in all of those hours before the dawn of this new day.

Easter is the most important holiday---the most holy day---of the Christian year.

And I know that each year on this day, we talk about these same things.

But each year, we come to the sanctuary, new, and changed, and different people.

---Living proof of the resurrection God brings to our souls over and over and over,
each day we're blessed to live.

Proof of that truth of the resurrection inside each of us,

that comes to you and to me, from living our days with God,

As we roll back the stone on our own lives time and time again.

It's a day of celebrating that Jesus was so intimately tied to God—the All—the Universe--

That not even pain, and punishment, and death could stop the flow of the life of God
from moving things as they needed to be, into what they needed to be.

...We celebrate this moment in Christ,

But we also celebrate this moment---each of us---

--as different members of the body of Christ---very personally, in ourselves, too.

---As tiny, moving pieces of the forever-living spirit of God,

knowing that the same miracle that happened in Christ,

Happens in each one of us, day by day as we grow and move

in the life God's breathed into our souls.

Each of us here has been broken, and put back together,

and returned as something new and different from what we once were.

Each year, each day, each minute, each second we're alive,

we participate in the changes that come with the constant movement of God's soul,

Each one of those experiences we have that take us apart,

and scatter our minds, and make ourselves unrecognizable to ourselves...

being just those dark hours before the dawn of a new day,

when we'll turn and see a fresh and changed face before our eyes,

as we look back at ourselves.

And *yes*, so often we get caught up in despair

and those feelings of isolation from God as things change.

As those pieces of us are scattered into a sort of chaotic entropy.

We feel alone, and lost... thinking ourselves without our guide. Without our God.

...but this day. Easter. Reminds us that we never participate in this life by ourselves.

That we are never outside the reach of God's voice.

We are never outside of God's constant company and care.

Today reminds us that God stands right behind us in all moments,

Just waiting for us to turn and see God close--- marvelous before our eyes---

as all things come back together, to bring us into new life.

Today, as we watch our sanctuary—our temple—

--that metaphor Jesus so often used to speak about each one of us---

Slowly come back to life. Back to God's use. Back into something fresh...

Let's give praise to God for those moments we're torn to pieces

and put carefully and lovingly back together again.

Let's remember that today---this new morning---

---is a day the Lord has made, and rejoice and be glad in it.

And let's thank God for those moments we roll back the stone on our own lives,

and find our old selves gone, standing outside and free of our past pain,

As something new and beautiful, and changed...

...and knowing ourselves blessed to have seen the resurrection of the Lord.

Amen.