

Awe and Great Joy

Matthew 28:1-10

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Stones have played a large role in our pre-Easter worship and a stone continues today to play a large role in our telling of the Easter story.

We started weeks ago dropping our stones into these pots. The container represented something we needed to let go, sometimes a sin, like prejudice and at other times hindrances like our past or fear. Our stones represented our confession of this is what hinders us from following God.

So we have repented and confessed and we have the clear expectation that we are heading in a different direction. We are Christians but we are not naïve. We may drop this stone and turn but we are imperfect and there will be yet another sin, habit, or concern that weights us down. Thank God Lent is only a season but Easter is permanent.

There was another stone, heavier than ours. This stone was quartz but it was more than quartz as well. It sealed the tomb of Jesus but this stone sealed our fate as well. It was a stone that demanded attention to the law when we were law breakers. It was a stone that ask us to center our lives around God when we were prone to center our lives around ourselves. A stone called perfection, when we were flawed. This stone was so heavy, so large, that we could not move it, this

stone would bury us. It was burying us, the weight of the law did not produce righteousness, it produced guilt. The weight of perfection did not produce more loving people, it produced more neurotic people.

It was clear this stone was too much for us. Yet for God, stones become pebbles. The earth quaked the angel came and the stone moved. Did you make the earthquake? Did I make the earthquake? Did the government make the earthquake? Did money make the earthquake? Of course not, but the earth did quake and the stone was moved.

Forgiveness replaces guilt, grace replaces perfection, and love replaced fear.

So there is something else in our pots today. Not simply stones, but flowers. New life in the midst of the broken, cold, stone. This is the way God works in spite of our brokenness, our sin, our imperfection, God still finds a way to create something beautiful. The resurrection does not make us perfect but it does infuse us with beauty. It does not undo all of our past deeds but it does impart forgiveness. The stone is no longer the hindrances that keeps us estranged from God, it is now the foundation God works through (picture of flower in sidewalk).

When the women arrived at the tomb in Matthew's story , unlike in Mark, they are not coming to prepare the body, they are simply coming to mourn. So they are not pre-occupied with moving the stone. Then there is an earthquake and the angel appears and the stone is moved. The women are invited to see the tomb is already empty. They came to mourn but they leave rejoicing. They came

loaded down with care but they leave renewed. They arrived living through a nightmare and they leave “filled with awe and great joy.”

That’s the story in a sentence. Our reaction to Easter. Our reaction to seeing death swallowed up by victory. Our reaction to the end of the power of the law. Our reaction to God’s gracious gift ----is to be filled with “awe and great joy.”

Our reaction to seeing a flower growing in the sidewalk---well mine is amazement. Awe. I mean how did this happen, there is so much sidewalk and so little dirt and yet with what little dirt is available, and with what little drainage there is, this little flower makes it. (show picture of flower in sidewalk) This is how are God operates, against all odds, with the exception to the rule, God finds a way.

The New Testament gives witness not to resurgence or a return to the status quo, but to newness. Do not misunderstand, this is a before and after photograph. Before, the law and guilt had their way and we would get what we deserved. And after, God’s grace gives us more than we deserved and more than we expect and our reaction is “awe and great joy.”

The resurrection announces the good news that this world was, is, and will be blessed and perfected, beyond our wildest hopes, our grandest visions, by the love of God made present in Jesus. Our reaction is “awe and great joy.”

This is our past. We have let it go. The stone has been moved. We forget the formers things because the living God is doing a new thing.

This is our fear. We let it go. The stone has been moved by God. God has not

given us a spirit of fear, the living God's word remains true "Be not afraid, I am with you."

This is our division. We let it go. The stone has been moved by God. Jesus has removed the artificial divisions that separate us from God and from each other.

This is our certainty. We let it go. People believed that Jesus was dead, but what died was certainty, God is moving forward so we no longer attempt to predict the movement of God, we follow the spirit.

This is our prejudice. We let it go. The stone has been moved. We have let go of the status quo and have been touched by the resurrected Christ.

With "awe and joy" we welcome the new life given to us by our Lord. Freed from our sin and past we rejoice in the gift given to us by