

Mark 16:1-8
“How Many Hands Does It Take To Make Easter?”

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This past week one of the children in our congregation—I won’t say who—asked me a question that my own children will sometimes ask me: What’s happening in church next Sunday? I’ll admit, whenever anyone asks me this question, but especially when it’s a child, I get a little nervous. I wonder if they think I don’t know what’s going to happen in church next Sunday. It’s Thursday and I still haven’t figured it out. I wonder how long they’ve been sitting in the pews looking up at me and thinking, you know, that guy doesn’t look like he knows what he’s doing. Maybe someone should ask him if he knows what he’s doing.

So when the question got asked of me this past week—“What’s happening in church next Sunday?—I asked them, “Why do you ask?”

“I know it will be Easter,” the child reported to me, “and I don’t think we have Sunday School, which means all the kids will be staying for the service. So I just wanted to know if you’ll be talking for a long time that day.”

“No longer than usual,” I told them in reply.

I thought we were done talking about it, but they went on. “Is there anything about church that will be different that day?” I thought about it for a moment. Something told me I was supposed to say yes, it will be Easter and *everything* will be different. But that didn’t seem quite right. After all, it’s not like this is our first Easter. It’s not like this is our first time hearing the old, old story of the empty tomb. This is not the first time we’ve sung the hymn “Christ Arose.” Of all the hymns in the hymnbook that people like to request to sing, this one is top of the list. Why? Because many of us grew up singing it. We know it. This isn’t our first time. And I would guess today won’t be our first or only egg hunt. And, this isn’t the first or only Sunday of the year when I’ll preach—and together we’ll proclaim—there is power over death. Over all the things we use to kill ourselves and one another in this world, there is power to heal and bring back to life. Over the power of greed there is the power of generosity. Over all the powers of prejudice and exclusion there is the power of understanding and love. There is power over death.

We have heard this before. When? A year ago, on Easter. And some of us have heard it even more recently than that. We heard it last Sunday, and the Sunday before that,

and the Sunday before that. And we heard it at the funeral last month. Our grief was huge, like a stone rolled over on top of us. It was all we could see and feel, but then we heard someone say, “There is power over death.” And somehow we managed to get up and go home. We returned to work. We went back to living. It felt like Easter.

“Is there anything about church that will be different on Easter?” Honestly, all I could think to tell them was, “There will be more people there than usual.”

There isn’t anything different about today really. The story is the same. The hymns are the same. The message is the same: “God who was faithful yesterday is faithful today and will be faithful tomorrow. There is power over death.” And for the most part, we the church are the same. Despite some of us having celebrated dozens of Easters; despite many of us having been here last week and the week before that, and at the funeral last month; despite our faith in believing there is power over death, we continue to move about in a world that is full—so very, very full—of death. Not much has changed. It’s all pretty much the same this week as it was last week, as it will be next week.

There are, however, a lot more people here than usual, which makes me wonder: what do you know that I don’t know? Is something going to happen that I don’t know about?

Maybe, maybe you’ve come today to see someone roll a stone away. All the stories we have about Easter involve a stone being rolled away. “Early on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb carrying spices. And while they walked together they said to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?’” In going to the cemetery, the women hope to embalm the body of their friend. It’s the proper Jewish thing to do—to care for the dead. They would have taken care of it on Friday when Jesus’s body was taken down from the cross, but by that time it was already evening and the Sabbath had begun, and they knew that meant having to stop all work for the day—also the proper Jewish thing to do. So now, three days later, they’ve come to finish the job. But who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb? (Drag a stone out into the middle of the floor, unwrap it, roll it, and take a bow.)

I know, I know, my stone is nothing compared to the one that must have covered up the tomb. That one would have been massive, big enough to cover an adult body. But you get my point: someone had to roll that stone over the tomb after Jesus was put in it, and if

someone could roll the stone into place, then someone could also have rolled it out of place. But who was going to do that? In his life, the people Jesus hung out with and cared about were the powerless types, those who never knew or who had simply forgotten—or been robbed of—the decency of their own humanity. He was killed by the powers of empire, of exploitation, of truth-deniers. In his death, they are not going to come for him, and the powerless whom he loved, they cannot roll the stone away. Arriving at the tomb, however, the powerless discover the stone has been rolled away. Who did it? Who is it that sees them in their sorrow? Who is it that cares for them in their grief? Who is it that is giving them access to the one thing that will give them comfort in death, the sight of their friend Jesus?

Do you see what's going on here? *The miracle of Easter is not that a stone has been rolled away. I can roll a stone away. You can roll a stone away. The miracle of Easter is that someone has cared enough to do so.* The miracle of Easter is that God sees these women in the darkness of the morning. He knows they've been up all night, unable to sleep because their heads and hearts are so heavy with the weight of everything they have lost, and how helpless they feel to change any of it. Their song is the song of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I cry in the night, but find no rest. All who see me mock me and shake their heads in cruel laughter." Nothing ever changes, they sing in sadness. It's all the same as it was before. When suddenly there's a crack of light, a voice rising up in the darkness, God saying, I see you there. And I am going to make a way for you. I am going to restore your hearts to hope. Look, the stone has been rolled away!

In his book, *"Truth to Tell,"* Frederick Buechner writes,

God is the comic shepherd who gets more of a kick out of finding one lost sheep than out of ninety-nine other sheep who had the good sense not to get lost in the first place. God is the eccentric host who, when the country-club crowd all turn out to have other things more important to do than come live it up with him, goes out into the skid rows and soup kitchens and charity wards and brings home a freak show. God is the man with no legs who sells shoelaces at the corner. The old woman in the moth-eaten fur coat who makes her daily rounds of the garbage cans. God is the old wino with his pint in a brown paper bag. The village idiot who

stands at the blinker light waving his hand as the cars go by. *God is the one crazy enough to push at stones too big to be moved.*¹

So I'm sorry if you showed up here today thinking you'd get to see someone roll a stone away, and now that you've seen me do it, you're unimpressed and left wondering, "What else is there?"

I'll tell you though, there's a lot more people here than usual, and I can't help but wonder what would happen if, out in this great big world of ours—where God is already hard at work pushing at the stones of war and hunger, of hatred and indifference, of classism and racism, of false lies and empty hopes, trying to get them rolling a bit, trying to roll them away all together—I wonder what would happen if all of us put our hands on the stones with God, and started pushing.

I bet we'd have ourselves an Easter the likes of which no one has ever seen before. I bet we'd have ourselves an Easter that would last well into tomorrow, and into the day after that, and into the day after that...

"What's happening in church next Sunday?" I admit, I always get a little nervous whenever anyone asks me this question. Like maybe they know something I don't know. Like maybe something's going to happen that I don't know about. Is it? Are you about to go and do something surprising? Maybe even crazy? For the sake of resurrecting love, I really hope you are.

¹ Pg. 66. *Italics mine.*