

The spin begins when the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb had to report back to their superiors that the dead man, whom they were guarding in a sealed tomb, escaped on their watch. Now that's a pretty tough thing for a soldier on guard duty to admit to. If you can't keep a dead man in captivity, what good are you? Under normal circumstances, the soldiers would have been court-martialed and probably put to death for such dereliction of duty. Lucky for them the Chief Priests wanted to spin the story and they needed "witnesses" to back them up: "Don't admit to Jesus' escape. Say you fell asleep and that His disciples came by night and stole His body away. Here, take some money and stay quiet. And if the governor hears of it, we'll work it out with him and keep you out of trouble. Just remember, whatever you do, stick to the spin!"

That battle between the truth of Jesus' resurrection from the grave and the spin that the devil would like to put on that truth, rages on today. Secret "codes" and "lost gospels" are dragged out to cast doubt on what really happened--to spin the story in another direction. The purveyors of religious tolerance and political correctness also want us to keep the real story under wraps. It's OK to talk about Jesus as long as we are talking about the historical figure who walked on earth as a teacher and prophet over 2000 years ago. It's OK to define Him as a moral teacher among many others, to put Him on par with Moses and Mohammed and Confucius and Aristotle, and Gandhi, but don't get too radical. Don't insist that He actually rose from the dead. Don't insist that He is still alive today. Don't elevate Him above the others and claim that He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, Savior of the world. Spin the story away from that because that is offensive in our pluralistic society.

There is the story and there is the spin and the spin is a lot more popular these days than the story. It's far more acceptable and safe to tell the spin and not the story. But for those of us who believe that the Bible, as we have it, is the inspired word of God, and for those of us who have come to know the risen Christ living among us and within us, the spin is not an option. We have to tell the story. In fact, Jesus commands it: Matthew 28:18-20 say, *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"* We are commissioned to tell

the story. Our mission in life is to tell the story. How can we not tell the story because the story has never ended.

I have resurrection news to announce to you this morning. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and I have seen the evidence to back it up. These are real life stories from people who share with us in the fellowship of our family of God here at Fourth Street. Rachele Jeffers was motivated by the risen Christ to donate part of her liver to save the life of Bud Mitchell. Bud has been given a new lease on life.,
The stone's been rolled away!

I know a couple of men whose lives and families were being destroyed by their addiction to alcohol. They've been alcohol free for a significant amount of time and come back to the Family of God.
The stone's been rolled away!

Many of us know a brother in the Lord who is in the process of taking a 30% pay cut so he can give his life to full time Christian ministry.
The stone's been rolled away!

I don't know about you but I love the fact that Easter this year falls on April 1st--**April Fool's Day**. The women coming on Easter morning to add burial spices to the dead body of Jesus, were surprised to find the stone already rolled away from the tomb. **April Fools!** Mary Magdalene went back to double check. She encountered a man whom she at first believed to be the Gardener. The risen Jesus spoke her name and Mary knew she'd been had. **April Fools!** Peter and John were told of the empty tomb and ran to prove to themselves that the women were mistaken. But they too were **April Fools!** The disciple Thomas said, *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* But when Jesus showed up, "Thomas:" **April Fool's**. The Jewish leaders that wanted to get rid of Jesus and the soldiers assigned to guard His tomb, woke up Easter morning to a rude awakening: The sealed tomb was unsealed and the body of Jesus had gone missing. **April Fools!** Pilate thought that by crucifying Jesus he had solved a political problem, but with the resurrection of Jesus his problem only got worse. **April Fools!** And, the greatest fool of all was the Devil; he thought that by managing to have Jesus executed he had won the day, but just the opposite was true. God received the execution of Jesus as the sacrifice to forgive all the sins of the world and to set people free from the Devil's grasp. **April**

Fools! Because Jesus is alive, the stone's been rolled away! All

who think otherwise are April Fools!

I wonder. When was the last time you felt as though you were looking at the back wall of a dead-end street with insufficient room to turn around to get back out? Maybe it was the day you lost your job. Maybe it was the day you found out that your son was doing drugs. Maybe it was the day your teenage daughter announced that she was pregnant and couldn't name the father. Maybe it was the day that the one person whom you loved more than life itself, died or committed suicide and left you stranded in your grief. Maybe it was that day when your doctor told you that you had diabetes, serious heart, liver, or kidney disease, or cancer. Maybe it was that day when your husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend, dumped you for a newer model. Maybe it was that day when the prison bars slammed shut behind you.

It is a fact that life can be experienced as a maze with many dead end streets and alleys. Everybody runs into one of these and usually more than one of them eventually. It might be, and is actually a high probability, that someone here this morning is staring at one of those big brick walls right now. For whatever reason, you are stuck--stuck in your disappointment, stuck in your anger, stuck in your grief, stuck in feeling like a failure, stuck in the label or in the diagnosis that was handed you by someone with a big degree hanging on an office wall--stuck in your fear.

Well, for you who may be stuck this morning, and for everyone who has been stuck or who will be stuck again in the future, **April Fools!** The stone is rolled away and because the stone is rolled away and because the same power that moved it is still available to us today, you don't have to be stuck anymore. **Glory, Hallelujah! The stone's been rolled away!**

Over and over again the Bible promises us that there are no dead end streets for the children of God. The central story of the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus. The Children of Israel were stuck as slaves in Egypt. It didn't seem that there was any way out. But God had another idea. He called Moses and sent him down to Egypt with a word for Pharaoh: "God says 'Let my people go.'" On the surface, Moses' demand to Pharaoh seemed ludicrous; from the human perspective, Moses' mission had about as much chance of success as

a snowball in Hades. But, God made it happen. Then the Israelites found themselves out of Egypt but trapped between the pursuing

Egyptian army on the one side and the Red Sea on the other. It appeared to be a dead end, but God made a way through the sea.

The central story of the New Testament is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, because the stone is rolled away from His tomb, there are no closed doors for us. Mark 10:27 says, *“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’”* Luke 1:37 says, *“For nothing is impossible with God.”* I Corinthians 10:13 says, *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* Paul says in Philippians 4:13 *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”* When we listen to Peter and Matthew and Luke and Paul, and all the New Testament witnesses, the message is very clear. They knew Jesus to be alive. They said what they said and did what they did because they experienced His presence and His guidance and His power in personal ways.

Turn with me again to Ephesians 1, beginning at verse 18. This is what God wants and has made possible for every person receiving this message today: Paul says, *“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”*

You will notice that there are two distinct things that Paul prays for us to receive. He prays that *“the eyes”* of our hearts *“may be enlightened”* in order that we might *“know the hope”* to which He has called us. Jesus said, *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but will have everlasting Life.”* Do you have that hope this morning? Do you know that when Jesus died on the cross He died to forgive your sins and to put you right with God? Do you know that since He conquered death, He has the

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authority to give you everlasting life? If you will put your trust in Him and ask Him to come into your heart and into your life as Savior and Lord, He will answer your prayer and begin to live in you and make Himself

real to you. You can know that hope which belongs to all the saints.

The second thing Paul prays for is that we might know *“His incomparably great power for us who believe.”* Paul says: *“That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”* You see, not only can we have the joy of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we have eternal life, but we can have the power to live victorious lives in the here and now. The resurrection power of Jesus is not just for the past and future. It's here for us now and we can draw upon that power to do more than we could ever hope or imagine without it. When we have that power living in us, nothing that God asks us to do will be impossible for us. There will be no dead end streets. This is the kind of life we can live when we know that the stone's been rolled away.

All that needs to happen for this to become real in your heart this morning can be pictured like this. Jesus died and was placed in the garden tomb. A stone was rolled in front and sealed to keep him in the grave. The angel of God, however broke the seal and rolled back the stone, letting Jesus out. Think about that in reverse. Perhaps the entrance to your mind and heart has been covered with a sealed stone. It's a stone of unbelief, a stone of fear, a stone kept in place by the lies of the devil.

But, if you will pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into your life, if you will give Him permission, God will break the seal and move that stone. Jesus will enter in. You will be able to experience new life in Christ because the stone's been rolled away. If you want to know Him to be alive in your life today, bow your head and pray this prayer: **“Lord Jesus. Please come and take away the stone to the entrance to my heart. I believe that You died on the cross to take away my sins. I believe you rose again to give me victory over death. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Grant me the power to live my life for you from this day on. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen.”**

Church of God

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Sermon for March 25, 2018 The Palm Sunday Challenge

John 12:12-26

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The Stone Is Rolled Away

In our Scripture lesson from Matthew 28 we see the two sides of journalism. We see the story and the spin. We see the revelation and the cover-up. An angel from the Lord tells the two Mary's what they need to know. Their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, whom they believed to be dead and who was in fact dead, is dead no longer. The empty tomb bears witness to His resurrection. When they leave the empty tomb to return to the others, Jesus Himself appears to them and demonstrates that He is indeed alive. This is the real story, this is the revelation. The women are commissioned to report these wondrous facts to the apostles and to deliver the message that Jesus will meet them back in Galilee.

The Fourth Street