

HOMILY
April 16, 2006

EASTER SUNDAY

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From the Gospel of Mark 16:1-7

Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had arisen, the women went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

When we're speaking of stone, it's not just a pebble or pea gravel. We're talking really big – refrigerator-big chunks of stone. The stone was profoundly disturbing. The stone blocked the entrance to the tomb denying access to Jesus. It was at that moment, a bitter and unyielding witness to death's power. The stone rolled to the entrance of the borrowed tomb shut off Jesus – Jesus, the Lord of their life, was dead – and not him only, but all that brought them light, purpose and hope. Their helplessness was mixed with hopelessness.

When the women asked, "Who shall roll away the stone for us?" they seem to have put into language the hopeless and helpless cry of humanity – doesn't it seem that for many of us, especially lately, life is like pushing against a huge stone? A stone like the one that blocked the entrance to Jesus' tomb. Don't many of us find ourselves pushing against something for a long time – pushing hard.

Maybe we've been pushing against all the uncertainties around us, like the threat of having our job downsized or working with somebody who is a challenge or a real thorn. Maybe we're pushing against a marriage or a friendship that seems destined for the ditch. Or maybe against chronic pain, against depression, against loneliness or grief, or against some other obstacle that is between us and our dreams. Maybe, like many people around the world, we're pushing against the anxiety that terrorists will strike again or that we'll be swallowed up in the culture of death.

We push and push and push. And in the end, in one of the worst ironies of our life, it seems that all that waits on the other side is death and defeat. Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?

But then, like the women ask, who will roll away the stone, we ask what can any of us do? No matter how much we push and push and push hard, we must simply recall those powerful words of Jesus that he prayed in the garden and on the cross before he died. We sang them so powerfully yesterday for the responsorial psalm on Good Friday:

Father, I put my life in your hands.

Jesus totally put his life into his Father's hands. And because he did, not only was the stone rolled away, but he was raised from the dead. Nothing, not even death or evil, will ever contain him or destroy him.

How we need to learn from Jesus, the Son of God – Jesus, our master and teacher. We, too, need to put our life into our Father's hands. To put into his hands every stone that we are pushing up against right now. Then the great miracle that happened to Jesus will happen to us. We will no longer live in a *Good Friday* world. We will enter *Easter Sunday*. That is what Easter is about.

We will discover that the stone we have been pushing against can be rolled away – the stone of our inadequacy, the stone of our fears and anxieties, the stone of our mortality. God has entered into the garden of our life and has miraculously acted on our behalf.

Suddenly, we have a new picture of our lives. That person at work who is a challenge will not get the best of us; the loss of a job will not destroy us; neither will the loss of a marriage or a friendship nor the loss of a dream, even our failing health. These huge stones and boulders that block our way do not have the power to hold us back because, in Easter, God has given us the ultimate victory. In Easter, God says to us there is nothing in this world or the next that will forever defeat one of God's children. God, our Father, has rolled away the stone that we may share in the glory of the Risen Lord.

A blessed Easter.

*Tomb, thou shalt not hold him longer;
Death is strong, but Life is stronger;
Stronger than the dark, the light;
Stronger than the wrong, the right;
Faith and Hope triumphant say
Christ will rise on Easter Day.*

Phillips Brooks