

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, April 9, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Who Will Roll Away the Stone?”

READING: Mark 16:1-6 – When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

Pharaohs built great pyramids in old Egypt filled with all kinds of luxuries and loot to while away the time until it was done. A Chinese emperor had a huge army of thousands of entirely different and unique ceramic soldiers and horses made to assure its happening. A famous baseball player had his body quick-frozen and kept perpetually at perfect zero until it could happen. The nobles and the wealthy of many ages and on nearly every continent had themselves buried in elaborate tombs supplied with utensils, gold, and now and again, a wife or two and a couple of servants so they wouldn’t be lonely or wanting until the time came. Nearly every religion known to man has some thoughts and even an answer or two when the subject comes up. So what am I talking about? The question the ladies asked one another as they hurried to Jesus’ tomb that Sunday morning: “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?”

That is a question that has bedeviled human beings from their earliest times. “When I die and the family buries my body, is that it? Or will there be more? If so, who will open my tomb and bid me to come out?” Good question, right? Hard question for the unbeliever, the agnostic, the skeptic, but not so hard for the Christians. Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb? The ancients outside Israel had all kinds of ideas. Most of them revolved around an afterlife that resembled their earthly existence only in a more ethereal plane. It was going to be so much like earthly life that they tried to pack every comfort, luxury, and tool so they wouldn’t be wanting “on the other side”. A lot of thought and a lot of expense went into it for those on the “uptown train.” For the poor and for the slaves, there was a plain and empty grave that might mean more of the same kind of existence in the afterlife. No promises of something better or freer.

Even still in our day there is much writing and speculating about what comes after death. Except for the hardcore and committed atheists, most people at least speculate about what might be waiting for them “out there.” Mostly it’s wishful thinking about “The Big Guy Upstairs” who’s been watching from a distance and knows that they “tried to be good.” They tried “not to hurt anybody” and they were good to kids and animals. They hope “The Big Guy” cuts them some slack “...cause after all, nobody’s perfect.” They have a nebulous hope to meet up with their family and loved ones somewhere, somehow. No promises; no assurances, just some wishful thoughts.

Not so you and me! We know EXACTLY who is going to roll away the stone from the entrance to our tombs. We know how he’s going to do it, too. “He will come on the clouds with the angels and the saints, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (I Thess. 4) That last and glorious day will be the fulfillment of every promise Jesus has made to us. No wishful thinking here. No nebulous hopes. We have HIS WORD on it.

When the women were hurrying to the tomb, their thoughts were filled with the practical details of a Jewish burial rite. Traditions and requirements had to be met. Things had to be done right. But the most practical of all their concerns was getting that tomb opened up. They had seen the stone rolled in place. They knew how big it was; all of them together would not be strong enough to budge it. So came the question, "Who will roll away the stone...?" Little did they guess that the answer had already been given. Their greatest needs has already been addressed: forgiveness of their sins, reconciliation with God, through baptism a status of sons and daughters of God would be given, and a reunion in heaven with their dear Lord and all those who died in Jesus. It had all been taken care of for them and for us.

So as you and I continue to celebrate the Easter season and rejoice in Jesus' resurrection, we don't have to wonder and worry about the afterlife. When we give up our final breath, we already have a place prepared for us by the One who did not let the stone set before his own tomb hinder him. That thing got blown away. It could not hold him. The grave could not claim him. Neither will our graves hold us. When the Lord gives the loud command, "Come out!" we will do what Lazarus did when he heard the voice of Jesus: come alive and come out! Stone or no stone! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) Please pray for our Junior Confirmands. This weekend they participate in their Retreat. On April 21 they will make their good Confessions in the Sunday morning services. And then on the 28th, they will be confirmed in the faith in the 10:30 service. Pray for Amelia, Madelyn, Maggie, Breena, Heidi, Knox, Landon, Asa, Kellen, and Lukas as they prepare themselves for the events of this month.