

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Risen One. Alleluia.

I hate to break the joy of the Alleluias for a moment, but in keeping with the mood of those first women as they left for the tomb on the third day, I'm going to ask you to imagine something extremely bleak. Imagine a world where the stone was never rolled away, a world where the women found things exactly as they had left them. They had last seen Jesus dead, his lifeless body, wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb. They saw the stone rolled in front of the entrance. Imagine that world where the stone stayed where it was, where the words "He is risen indeed!" had never been spoken because Christ was still dead, and Christians never even existed.

That's a world where a heavy shroud of darkness and death hangs like a wet wool blanket over the everlasting funeral called today. That veil of tears and death hangs so heavy it threatens to suffocate everything beneath it. And the funeral goes on like a monotonous pick-up game, ending and resuming over and over again whenever the next life falls back to the dust. In that world, **Life** itself is merely dying out and death is victorious--if the stone was still in its place.

Outside that cold lifeless stone, the highest law of the land is the common law of animals, "Survival of the fittest." And the sum total of the meaning of life is reduced to trying to avoid death, and failing. Everyone failing all the time. Real Love and those three little words "I love you," have been forever erased from hearts and minds and vocabularies and replaced with what people actually mean, "I lust you." **Love** can simply no longer exist if the God who is Love still lies dead behind the stone, exposed as a liar—if the stone was never rolled away.

There behind the stone **Truth** lies dead as well if the one who claimed to be the Way and the Truth and the Life could not prove to be any of the three. Then there are many ways and many truths that all lead to nothing, and every person becomes the supreme judge of their own truth. Since everyone's truth is different, there really is no truth at all--if the stone was never rolled way.

Far away from the stone, this world is totally devoid of **joy** because **Joy** itself died long ago and stayed in the tomb. And so, people can never know joy again because joy comes from sharing Life and Love and Truth with other people. And all of those are dead. In that world everyone only lives for themselves. If the stone lies stuck in place unmoved, then joy lies behind, never to be seen or heard from again.

If the stone was never rolled away and Jesus was dead and so was life and love and truth and joy, then you can kiss **Hope** and **Peace** goodbye as well. Nothing would ever be as it should

be. Nothing would ever have a chance of getting better. People wouldn't even bother to talk anymore, they'd only yell, only criticize, only fight. In a world where the stone was never rolled away, the foul stench of death proclaims its victory. If the stone lies in place, then the Great Unstoppable Almighty came up against the immovable reality that is death, and He lost. It won. Death wins—if the stone had not been rolled away.

My friends, that's the biggest "if" this world has ever known. And we'll never need to find out the misery that all of that would feel like if it were true. Because it's simply not true. Don't forget that we were imagining! That world is not this world, and that stone does not rest in its place unopened. It was the very first thing that happened on morning of the third day as the ground shook and the angel rolled away the stone. He was lifting the shroud of death and the veil of tears from eyes of the world, exposing Life and Love and Truth and Joy and Hope and Peace for all to see because Jesus was not dead in the tomb but alive!

But you might ask, "If the stone has been rolled away, why does that world we imagined before where everything good was dead, why does it feel so familiar to us? Why does that bleak world feel so much like this world?" Life and Love and Truth, Joy Hope and Peace seem like such foreign concepts, and Death seems to have our world by the throat. The veil seems intact, and there's so many funerals and so much pain.

Perhaps it feels that way for two reasons. First, it's because the masses of this world either don't know that the stone has been rolled away or worse, don't care. Their eyes are indeed still veiled with the shroud of death. For **"The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 4)**. They are still trapped under the wet wool blanket of death and so the message of the cross and tomb is foolishness to those who are perishing.

Secondly, it's because sin afflicts those who do know and do care that the stone has been rolled away with a daily amnesia, like a persistent memory loss. It's like the devil and all his evil angels spend their day playing a game of monkeys on the bed, lifting up the sheet, trying to cover our eyes again with the dark shroud of mourning and ignorance and death. When they succeed, then our eyes are veiled again, along with the eyes of the world, and then this world of ours quickly begins to feel like that dark world of death where the stone was never rolled away. That's what happens if we forget to remember every day that the stone has been rolled away, that Life rose from the dead, that Jesus rose from the dead.

It's what happened to the followers of Jesus on the morning of the third day. They forgot to remember! The women went early that morning thinking it was still a funeral. They were carrying their spices expecting to find Jesus' body right where they left it. And they were worried because they thought the stone was going to be there blocking the tomb. They were living in the world where Jesus was still dead, and life itself with him.

But they did not find the world to be as they left it on Friday. The stone was rolled away. The body of Jesus was gone! While they were wondering, the two angels appeared gleaming like a flash of lighting into their dark world. Their job was to remind them to remember! **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:6)**  
**“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee. “The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again” (Luke 24:7)**

Remember what happened next? **“Then they remembered his words.” (24:8).** Ohhhh! That's what he was saying! It's recorded three different times in the book of Luke where Jesus predicts what is going to happen. **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest and the teachers of the law, and must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (Luke 9:22).** The problem is they forgot to remember Jesus was going to rise because they were caught in the terror of living through Jesus' death.

The angels reminded the women and sent them to do the same for the disciples: to remind them to remember what Jesus had said, that he would rise, and now he had. Still the hearts of the disciples were groggy. The sheet of death was pulled back over their heads as well. And so, the women's report seemed like nonsense until they saw for themselves! But soon they remembered to remember what Jesus had said, that he would rise from the dead, and the veil of tears was pulled from their eyes. Jesus was alive and so was life and love and truth and joy and hope and peace. Death had been dealt a deathblow, and its veil torn in two. Just as the prophet Isaiah spoke long ago, **“On this mountain, (Jerusalem, the mountain where Jesus was crucified) God will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from the earth. The Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 25:**

My friends, this is the world you live in! This is the world where the stone has been rolled away and Christ is indeed risen from the dead. This is the world where Life marches

victorious over death and your disgrace has been removed forever. You have every blessing that comes from life in him--love and joy and hope and peace that all rests on the unshakeable truth of his resurrection. That's what this day is all about--**remembering to remember that the stone has been rolled away**. That Jesus said he would rise and that he did rise. And by doing so, he has destroyed the shroud of death that covers all people.

But if we don't remember, life goes on as if he lost and we lost. Our job is to hold his victory before our eyes every day and to hold out that victory to a world of people who need it, even if they don't know it. We live in a world where death does not win. Jesus the Resurrection and the Life wins! **Life marches victorious over death** and will keep marching into eternity. Our only hope to share in that life is for the Holy Spirit to shake off the remnants of that veil every day so that we **remember the stone has been rolled away!**

The trouble is our memory loss is persistent! There's a love story that illustrates this point about a woman who suffers from a strange type of amnesia. She was in a terrible car wreck, which destroyed her short-term memory. So every day she wakes up, her memory resets to the morning before the crash and she can't remember anything that happens from the day before. One day she meets a man, who falls in love with her and she with him, but the next day, she wakes up and doesn't remember him at all. Every day this man must find a way to make her fall in love with him all over again. But he can't ever get her to remember it the next day, until he thinks of something. He records a video of their life together from the past days, their love and everything about their relationship, so that every day he can help her to remember who he is to her and all that he has done for her.

I'll admit to you, I never imagined I would use Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore in *50 First Dates* as a picture of Christ and his bride the Church. But doesn't it make a beautiful comparison. Every day it seems we are struck with amnesia and wake up back in a world where sin and death reign and joy and love are absent, and we struggle to find hope or peace. And every day our God reminds us to fall in love with him all over again. He records the entire story of his love for us so that we may read it and know day after day who he is and all that he has done. That he suffered for us, was handed over, and killed, and on the third day he rose from the dead to bring us the victory. These truths he has recorded for us in his word to relearn and fall in love with him again every day. **"These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name."** (John 20:31)

That's why we continue to gather on Easter day and make every Sunday a mini-Easter! We gather to remember so that we never forget! We must remember to remember that he has done what he has promised. The veil of death has been destroyed! The stone has been rolled away! Jesus has risen from the dead and so Life marches victorious over death. Remember it always. He is risen, indeed. Alleluia Amen!

**Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**