

SLD04.12.09 Easter
Emory Presbyterian Church
John 20:1-18 (Mt 27:62-66)
Jill Oglesby Evans

“The Boulder’s Tale”

I want to tell you a story this morning. It’s not my story, though I wish it were. Maybe it will be one day. Maybe one day, it’ll be yours, too. Maybe it already is. This morning, though, it’s the story of an ancient one who came long before you or I or any other human being walked this earth. For today’s story is a stone’s story, a rock’s song, the terrestrial tale of a hard, harsh, piece of this planet who has some wisdom to share. And what possible wisdom might a broad-shouldered boulder have to offer? Well, listen and see, for this is the tale of the boulder that covered Jesus’ tomb. It begins like this:

“Hi. I’m a rock, a boulder. At least I used to be. I used to be big. *Really* big. I’m talkin’ bigger than a man could move. Bigger than three men could move. In fact, back in the garden of Gethsemane, it took four hefty soldiers to push me across the mouth of a tomb. Fella in the tomb was dead, of course, but apparently some folks thought he might still be dangerous. Something about making sure nobody made off with his body and then spread the rumor he’d actually gone and done what he’d said he was going to do. Rise from the dead or some such.

“Anyway, somebody sees me nearby and thinks I’m just the ticket, rock-solid insurance against anybody moving the body. I’m telling you, I was *big*. Maybe not so much anymore, but I’ll explain that later. Anyway, at the time, like I said, takes four men to move me. Four *big* men. And two levers. I break the first one.

“I don’t budge easily, see. In fact, I don’t prefer to move at all. Wherever I am, that’s where I want to be. And where I want to stay, you know what I mean? Period.

“I resisted all I could.

“But you know physics.

“So there I end up, blocking the mouth of the tomb of the dead guy. Big hole where I used to be. *Big* hole, just gaping there next to the tomb - gouged earth and sweat trailing ragged to this new god-forsaken spot. And I am NOT happy.

“But here’s the thing: the guy in the tomb isn’t (apparently) just any dead guy. They call him, ‘Jesus.’ Not everybody, mind you. Guys who rolled me over here, they call him a ‘son-of- a....’ Or maybe they were calling me that, I don’t know. But the ladies who show up later, the wailing ones, they call him ‘Jesus.’ Jesus Christ.

“Me, I’m thinking, ‘whatever.’ Just don’t move me again.

“They keep showing up, the ladies, crying and carrying on. Personally, I’m used to it. Jesus ain’t the only one buried here.

“Then one night, third one, I think, I notice something going on along my backside. Something like a...I don’t know... I’m a rock...my vocabulary’s limited. Maybe like the dawn starting to break after long rainy night? You know how, if you’re up that early, and outside, you can sort of sense the dawn before you see it? It was sort of like that. Just the slightest shifting of the shadow along my backside.

Only it’s on the wrong side for the sun, which doesn’t make any sense. Myself, I like things to make sense. I like things steady, predictable, sure. Like I said, I’m not a big fan of change. Thing is, even though the front side of me can tell it’s way before dawn, the backside of me is losing shadows, and I want it to quit.

“It doesn’t quit.

“You know, it starts to occur to me that these days I don’t seem to be getting just a whole lot of what I want, so I just settle in and watch. The light grows in the tomb. The air in there starts warming up. The light gets brighter, the air, warmer. And the dead guy? Is glowing!

“I think, ‘this is weird.’ And I don’t like weird.

“Nothing happens for a while so I start to relax. I think, ‘maybe this is all some passing geological phenomenon involving phosphorescent rock. You know, like maybe the soldiers tracked something in on their sandals.

“You’re aware, of course, that the luminous quality of certain stones has been studied for centuries. Back in 1675, a physician named Mentzel wrote a treatise on a phosphorescent stone named the Bologna stone. Did you know that *all* diamonds phosphoresce when exposed to radium, polonium, or actinium, though only certain ones can absorb light and then give it off in the dark?¹

“[You may be surprised at my erudition on such matters but remember, I’ve been around a long time. Just because I don’t like change doesn’t mean I haven’t endured a lot of it in the course of creation. Plus my uncle on my mother’s side is a philosopher’s stone. For the record, I resent the phrase, ‘dumb as rocks.’ Wanna stay on my good side, use ‘dumb as a bag of hammers.’]

“But then I think, ‘those soldiers probably didn’t track in any diamonds on their sandals. Anyway, things have calmed down along my backside....

“Only suddenly something *does* happen, though I can’t say exactly what, except that everything feels different. I don’t know how to say it any better than that.

¹ <http://www.jjkent.com/articles/experimentsstudiesluminousstoneshtm>

Something shifts in the air or something, I don't know, and everything changes. At least everything as I understand it.

"Suddenly there's more light than I have words for, and a kind of warmth that isn't...hot exactly...so much as *penetrating*. In fact, it penetrates right through me and on out into the night until not just me but everything in the garden me glows!

"And I think, 'whoa.'

"And the dead guy? He isn't dead anymore! I guess you could say he was alive only it wasn't like any kind of alive *I'd* ever seen before. I mean, all this light is coming from a place inside him to where I can hardly see the outline of his body, though I can tell he isn't lying down anymore.

"His clothes are, though. No, not clothes. What do you call those things they wrap around dead people? Shrouds, I guess. Linen shrouds. Yeah, that's it. Jesus' shrouds are still lying on my cousin, the slab, all folded up tidy-like.

"So I ask my cousin, I say, 'what just happened? Are we talking phosphorescent stones on steroids or what?' He just grunts.

You know slabs. That's how slabs shrug. They grunt.

'Course that's how they laugh, too. And argue. And weep.

We're not a real expressive crowd, my family, especially on the slab side. In any case, clearly he has no clue what's just happened.

"So I look out and a light I'm more familiar with starts showing on the horizon. Dawn's coming. What a relief!

"Until I start to feel myself moving.

"And I think to myself, 'Oh no, not again!'

“I feel something’s touching me... sort of. Not touching exactly...but something feels...soothing like. Frantically, I look around, but all I see is the light. Still, I can tell I’m moving and I don’t like it and I’m scared. But somehow, too, I know wherever I’m moving is where I’m meant to be.

“Hate change. Have I mentioned how I hate change? Funny thing is, I didn’t hate this. Felt like I was being moved back to where I came from, back where I was placed in the very beginning.

“Still, I was scared. So on the outside chance that this Jesus guy or force or phosphorescence or whatever he is, is weird enough to talk to rocks, I call out his name.

“‘Jesus!’

“I just need to know where he is, and, well, *what* he is, and what the heck he’s doing to me!

“Suddenly I can feel him there - don’t know if he touches me or speaks to me or what, but I can feel his presence and it’s like things are okay, like things are the way they’re supposed to be, and everything’s going to be okay. This is a relief.

“And there’s the tomb sitting there, all wide open and relaxed and empty except for those folded clothes lying on cousin slab, who, of course, is gruntin’ happily away.

“Until along comes one of the crying ladies again. And when she sees the tomb is open and empty, she sort of flips out and goes running off to find someone else. A couple other guys come running back with her and see what she saw but can’t make any better sense of it than she can. So they leave and the crying lady keeps standing there crying, and mumbling something to the residual glow.

“Then what do you know but that Jesus comes right up behind her. She turns around and looks right at him and thinks he’s the gardener. Asks him where he’s taken the body. (*Now who’s dumber than a bag of hammers?*)

“Until Jesus says her name, and she gets all emotional again and so forth, until she finally goes away and leaves me and Jesus in peace.

“Jesus makes like he’s going to leave, too, only then he stops and turns around and looks at me. I mean, looks straight into my heart. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a boulder blush. . I start getting warm and pinkish all over , which, unless you happen to be rose quartz, looks pretty silly. And then I start hearing this sound that’s *really* embarrassing because it’s coming from me, and Lord knows, I don’t have much of a voice. But I’m here to tell you, that Jesus can flat make a stone sing!

“Next thing you know, Jesus smiles and puts his hand on me and...well...I don’t know how else to say it except that I explode with joy. Literally. Jesus touches me and I blow up into a thousand million little pieces that start raining all over creation until I’m not just me anymore, but a thousand million little me’s sent out to join with the hands and feet of a thousand million little you’s – which, if it doesn’t make any sense to you, imagine how *I* feel about it.

“All I know is that when Jesus touches me, all of a sudden I want to be bigger than I am (and remember, I was already pretty big.) And suddenly I *am* bigger, only littler, too – all those silly little bitty pieces of me rolling and raining all over creation.

“It’s the strangest thing and I’m no good at explaining it. But it was like I couldn’t wait to give myself away. Pure-d foolishness for a boulder like me, huh. But there it was. And there it is. And here I am.

“So, for what it’s worth, that’s my story. How I met the risen Jesus, how he touched me, how I got bigger, then smaller, than couldn’t wait to give myself away. Hope you’ll remember it, in case you ever get a chance to meet him. In fact, to help you remember, I’d like to give each of you a piece of me. Like I said, Jesus makes you want to do that. So here in a minute, when the choir sings and the offering plate comes around, a bowl of ‘little me’s’ will come around, too. So when you give away a little piece of you in the offering plate, pick up a little piece of me. You know, just to help you remember. That, and in case you have a boulder of your own that needs moving.

To the glory of God. Amen.