

[“He is risen! He is risen!](#)

Tell it out with joyful voice.

He has burst his three-day prison;

Let the whole wide earth rejoice.

Death is conquered; we are free

Christ has won the victory.”

I love this hymn; the words share the Good News of Easter, the crux (the heart) of our faith: The tomb is empty. Christ is alive (let Christians sing)! Though Jesus has been dead. Not just a little dead, but three-day dead, smelly dead, locked in a stone-cold tomb; buried, bound, gone. But—rejoice—Christ is alive (let Christians sing)! We, too, can escape the prison of death. **If only—if only—someone could roll away the stone.**

But, today is Easter Sunday. SOMEONE did roll away the stone. Christ Jesus IS risen; he has been raised from the dead. We know not HOW, but our experience, our testimony, is that we have experienced the LIVING Christ.



Farrell Hartigan's "Jesus tomb," with rolling stone



Farrell Hartigan's "Jesus tomb," with rolling stone and angel

I’ve experienced the living Christ: He rolled away my stone of self-hatred and fear, set me free, for all eternity. He walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. I hope YOU have experienced the living Christ; he’s pure love, pure joy. He’s new life, new beginnings. We don’t have to stay in the tombs of our dead lives; **if only—if only—someone could roll away the stone.**

Did you notice in Mark’s gospel, which we heard today, that the three women who found Jesus’ tomb empty didn’t see or speak to the risen Christ? No talking to Jesus at the tomb, as in Matthew’s gospel, and no talking to him while thinking he was the gardener, as in John’s gospel. No, the

women didn't talk to Jesus at the tomb in Mark's gospel <long pause> not unless Jesus himself was the young man robed in transfiguration white sitting in the tomb.



Fra Angelico, Noli Me Tangere, 1440-1442, public domain

This man COULD have been an angel; there were angels near the tomb in the other gospels. One of the angels even had rolled away the stone in Matthew's account. WHOEVER rolled away the stone didn't open the tomb to let Christ Jesus out of the tomb; he was already gone. The intent must have been to ensure that people could get INTO the tomb to see that it was empty.

But maybe, just maybe, as some suggest, the young man in the tomb in Mark's gospel

was the very same person who had run away naked in the Garden of Gethsemane. THAT young man had run away to avoid the soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus, shedding his cloak to elude capture. Wouldn't the story be elegant if THAT fearful person had gathered his courage and—clothed now in radiant, **transfiguration faith**—had entered the tomb because he believed what Jesus had told them on the way to Jerusalem:

- “I will be killed,” he said, and
- “It is necessary that I must die,” he said, and
- “I will rise again after three days,” he said.

We just don't know who this young man WAS who was in the tomb. But we know WHY the three women were there. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were at the tomb at first light to accomplish a labor of love; they were there to anoint Jesus' body. They brought new spices, purchased just for this occasion, because this is what we do when a loved one dies: We manage our grief by tending our loved one's remains.

So, the three women went to the tomb at dawn. THEY were NOT humming, “He is risen! He is risen!” on the way to the tomb. Instead, they were worried about how they would be able to get IN, how to get past that big stone that would be blocking their way. They were thinking, our gospel lesson tells us, that they would anoint Jesus' dead body, **if only—if only—someone could roll away the stone.**

Think about the situation. These women set out in faith that they would be able to somehow get beyond the stone and into the tomb. They didn't even expect to be able to get in, not by themselves. Instead, they trusted that somehow, someone would roll the stone away for them. At the crack of dawn, mind you. They weren't yet wearing transfiguration attire; they just didn't know yet that Christ had been risen from the dead.

Have you ever felt like these women must have felt?

- Compelled to do something impossible:
Compelled to set out on a task that didn't pass the logic test?
- Compelled, through faith, that love would find a way? Not OUR love, you understand, but faith that SOMEONE would roll away the death-stone.

Life is full of death-stones, stones that lead to death, stones we find impossible to roll away by ourselves. Stones of death, loss, fear, and grief. Stones of anger and indifference. Stones of regret, self-hatred, resentment, and addiction. All kinds of death-stones we need someone's help to budge. **Who will roll away** these boulders of gloom and pain?

In case you are wondering today about stones you face, wondering who will remove them for you, wonder no longer. The same who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will move your stone for you. The same who sent the young man and clothed him in transfiguration white. The same who shouts NEW LIFE into existence and brings the Resurrection dawn. God, of course, the very same God who put chaos in its place in the first place, the one who raised Christ Jesus from the dead. THAT ONE can move all our death-stones. If we don't let ourselves be distracted by fear or false logic or nakedness of faith.

So, I say to you today: THE TOMB IS EMPTY. The young man clothed in white (**whoever he was**) tells us what our response should be:

["He is risen! He is risen!"](#)
Tell it out with joyful voice.
He has burst his three-day prison;
Let the whole wide earth rejoice.
Death is conquered; we are free
Christ has won the victory."

Alleluia; Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!