

Jesus and the Women at the Tomb

Mark 16:1-20

Do you remember the Legend of the Touchstone? It's a great story to recall on Easter Sunday morning. According to that ancient legend, if you could find the touchstone on the coast of the Black Sea and hold it in your hand, everything you touched would turn to gold. You could recognize the touchstone by its warmth. The other stones would feel cold, but when you picked up the touchstone, it would turn warm in your hand.

Once a man sold everything he had and went to the coast of the Black Sea in search of the touchstone. He began immediately to walk along the shoreline picking up one stone after another in his diligent and intentional search for the touchstone. He was consumed with this dream. He wanted desperately to find this miraculous stone. However, after several days had passed, he suddenly realized that he was picking up the same stones again and again. So he devised a plan... pick up a stone; if it's cold, throw it into the sea. This he did for weeks and weeks.

Then one morning he went out to continue his search for the touchstone. He picked up a stone; it was cold... he threw it into the sea. He picked up another stone - cold! He threw it into the sea. He picked up another stone... it turned warm in his hand, and before he realized what he was doing... he threw it into the sea!

That's a good parable for Easter, isn't it? Because that can so easily happen to us. We can come upon a miraculous moment like Easter... we can feel it turn warm in our hands... but then (so dulled by the routine) before we realize what we are doing... we throw it away. Absentmindedly, mechanically, nonchalantly... we toss it aside and miss the miracle of Easter.

Listen! Please don't throw it away this year. Please don't miss it this time. This year seize and celebrate and embrace the incredible good news of Easter. In particular this year, let me urge and encourage you to take hold of one of the greatest nuggets of God's truth, namely - the redemptive power of Easter. Don't miss this. Easter shows us dramatically that God has the power to redeem. He can through the miracle of His grace, turn bad things into good things, change things and make things better for you.

On Easter morning, the women came to the tomb in sadness, in defeat, in grief, in disillusionment. But there they found out firsthand about God's power to redeem. There at the empty tomb on Easter morning they found out dramatically that He can turn defeats into victories, despair into hope, and death into life. God has the power to redeem. He can turn the heartache of Good Friday into the Hallelujah Chorus of Easter morning.

In 1986 the third baseman for the San Francisco Giants, Bob Brenley, set a major league record with four errors in one game at third base, against the Atlanta Braves. But, then at his last time at bat in the bottom of the ninth inning, the count was three and two; Bob Brenley hit a homerun and won the game 7 - 6. From goat to hero with one swing of the bat. As Bob Brenley circled the bases with his game-winning homerun, the radio announcer said, "Well, folks, Bob Brenley just redeemed himself." A bad day turned around. The jeers turned to cheers. A nightmare became the dream of a lifetime.

Now, in sports a player may be able to redeem himself and turn it around by his own ability, but when it comes to our souls, when it comes to our spiritual lives, only God can redeem. Only God can save. Only God can turn defeat into victory, death into life. This is the message of Holy Week... "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

This is the message of Easter... *"O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ...(I Cor. 15:55-56) Do not be alarmed, you are looking*

for Jesus... He has been raised; He is not here... (Mark 16:6) So, why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen. (Luke 24:5-6).

He lives and because He lives, we too can live through faith in Him. We too, can be resurrected!"

God has the power to redeem! That's the good news of our faith, isn't it? It means that no defeat needs to be final - no heartache has to last forever - Good Fridays will come into our lives, but if we hang in and trust God, He has an Easter morning waiting for us on the other side. Through the miracle of God's grace, we can bounce back; we can change; we can start over; we can have a new beginning, a new life.

When you stop to think about it, God's redemptive power is absolutely amazing. And once each year, along comes Easter to remind us of that. Let me show you what I mean.

First Of All, Easter Reminds Us That Events Can Be Redeemed.

We see this graphically in the painful events of Holy Week... treachery, deceit, jealousy, betrayal, denial, lies, bribed witnesses, trumped-up charges, false accusations, a fixed trial led to the crucifixion of one who was totally innocent.

Satan thought he had destroyed the Son of God. The Jewish leaders thought they had eliminated a popular preacher that questioned their conduct and attitudes. The Roman governor thought he had killed a potential leader of a rebel faction that would try to overthrow the Roman government. Terrible events... but God somehow redeemed those events and miraculously brought good out of them. God has the power to do that. Let me show you what I mean.

Rosemary Brown serves as minister of a church in Tennessee. She tells the story about an event that happened when she was eight years old... an event that touched her life and changed her life forever.

There was a little boy who lived in her neighborhood. His name was Jeter. Jeter was an only child of well-to-do parents who made sure he received everything his little heart desired. Well, one day his little heart desired the very thing that eight-year-old Rosemary Brown's heart desired... it was a drum that had suddenly appeared in the display window at Penney's department store. It was white with blue stars and a red, white and blue strap that went around your neck to hold the drum in place. There were two drumsticks for beating out the rhythm, and Rosemary Brown was certain that she would lead the parade if she just owned it. O my, Rosemary wanted that drum so much she could taste it!

At dinner that night, Rosemary told her dad about the drum and how much she wanted it. Her dad asked how much it cost. When Rosemary told him twenty dollars, her dad said in a kind of sad voice, "We'll see, honey, we'll see."

Then the very next day, Rosemary heard a sound out in the front yard, a loud noise. She looked out and can you believe it? There stood Jeter with her drum around his neck. Jeter was beating out a rat-a-tat-tat and hollering for all the kids in the neighborhood to come and join his parade. Rosemary's heart was absolutely broken... and she made up her mind to put Jeter in his place once and for all.

So, she gathered up all her playmates on C Street and she devised a plan. She told the other kids that they would all fall in line behind Jeter, but when they got in front of Mrs. Hilt's house, they would all duck behind the privet hedge in her yard and leave spoiled Jeter out in the street marching by himself. Well, Jeter started strutting down the street, his head thrown back and his knees flying up as he beat out that rat-a-tat-tat on his new drum.

Rosemary and her friends all followed in line, marching behind Jeter, excited about their plan to desert Jeter. When they got to the privet hedge, Rosemary gave her pre-arranged signal... and one by one, they all left the parade and hid, trying hard not to giggle out loud. They were so proud because their trick was working perfectly.

Jeter just kept on marching all alone. When Jeter reached the end of the street he looked back. He turned around and saw that he had been deserted by all of them. Then he did something that Rosemary had not counted on. At the age of eight years old, she was not prepared for what happened next. Jeter's little arms dropped to his sides and in a voice Rosemary would never forget, Jeter whimpered, "Little Band, where are you?" And then as if to punish Rosemary for the rest of her life, Jeter started crying.

That was a crossroads moment for Rosemary Brown. Never before in her eight years of life had she intentionally hurt another human being the way she hurt little Jeter that day. She had premeditated his downfall as the neighborhood kid who always got what he wanted... but she didn't like the way that felt. It was not fun at all. It was terrible and she felt horrible... and that day, even though she was only eight, she made up her mind to never again intentionally hurt another person as long as she lived. She asked God to forgive her... and to help her to be on the side of helping people, not hurting them.

God redeemed that event... because Rosemary Brown grew up to become one of the most loving, compassionate, caring pastors in our United Methodist Church today.

Some of you have also had experiencing where ugly things in your life have been turned into something wonderful. When you were at the end of your addiction, God gave you hope and a new life. When you had destroyed your reputation, God gave you grace and you have found a life worth living in Him.

That's what Easter is about, isn't it? How God in His power and grace can take bad things and turn them into good things... how He can redeem events!

Second, Easter Reminds Us That Things Can Be Redeemed.

Think of that. God can even redeem material things. For example, I'm thinking of John Wesley's study desk on display in his home in London. It's a prime example. That same desk once belonged to a bookie. Designed originally for taking gambling bets, it was redeemed to be a place of spiritual power where John Wesley thought through and wrote down his greatest sermons.

A.J. Gordon was the great Baptist pastor of the Clarendon Church in Boston, Massachusetts. One day he met a young boy in front of the sanctuary carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. Gordon inquired, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy replied, "I trapped them out in the field." "What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home."

When Gordon offered to buy them, the lad exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well." Gordon replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage and the birds." "Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain." The exchange was made and the boy went away whistling, happy with his shiny coins.

Gordon walked around to the back of the church property, opened the door of the small wire coop, and let the struggling creatures soar into the blue. The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon about Christ's coming to seek and to save the lost paying for them with His own

precious blood. "That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said Gordon, "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

Mostly though, I'm thinking of the Cross. The Cross, once the emblem of suffering and shame and punishment and death, has been redeemed... and now is the symbol of love and victory and forgiveness and life and salvation. So, you see, events can be redeemed and things can be redeemed.

Third And Finally, People Can Be Redeemed.

Easter reminds us that people like you and me can be redeemed. We don't have to stay the way we are. We can be forgiven, reshaped, reclaimed, resurrected. Be honest with yourself. Is there something in your life that needs to be changed? Is there a secret sin, a vengeful spirit, a bad temper, a lack of commitment, a hateful attitude in you... that you would be a whole lot better off without. If you'll let Him, God can change you. He can bring you out of the tombs that imprison you.

On July 23, 2002, nine miners in Western Pennsylvania became trapped in a flooded mine. The injured and desperate men tied themselves together so that the stronger ones could sustain the weaker ones as they waited to be rescued. Journalists from across the nation reported the rescue effort, which took five long days. No one could believe it when all nine miners emerged safely from the mine.

On July 30, the people of the small mining community gathered for a worship service to thank God for saving the miners' lives. At the ceremony, there were ten miners' lamps set up on the altar, even though there were only nine miners. According to the pastor who presided over the worship celebration, the tenth lamp represented God's presence, which the miners claimed they could feel as they waited to be rescued. It was this "10th Man" they honored as they read *Psalm 103: "Praise the Lord . . . Who redeems your life from the pit."* Welcome to this celebration of our "tenth man" the One who has rescued us from the pit.

In a previous town where we lived there was a place where they scrap iron, old bottles, cans, rags, wrecked cars, and broken machinery. One day, I saw the workers loading great quantities of scrap iron onto a railroad car. It will go to a factory to be reclaimed, to be melted down and remade into something new. It may come out as surgeon's tools, or fenders for a new car, or maybe even as a steeple for a church. Who knows what it may be, but it will be new and useful and valuable.

Now, if we can do that with our old scrap iron, how much more can God do with human beings, with people like you and me! You know, He wants to! He wants to reclaim us. He wants to reshape us. He wants to redeem us.

He Is Risen! He Lives! He Wants Us To Rise And Live Too!