

1

When was the last time you were a bit reluctant to try something you hadn't done before?

Sometimes we may avoid something because we don't think we will like it even though we haven't tried it. At other times we don't really believe we can do something, so we come up with all kinds of excuses why to avoid even trying.

I remember when I was in seminary and I wanted to avoid preaching. I enjoyed studying biblical stories, thinking theologically, and teaching children, youth, and adults, but speaking in front of people was not something I wanted to try. I was reminded of that experience when I read about

a first year student in...seminary [who was studying to be a minister who] was told by the dean that he should plan to preach the sermon in chapel the following day. He had never preached a sermon before, he was nervous and afraid, and he stayed up all night, but in the morning, he didn't have a sermon. He stood in the pulpit, looked out at his classmates and said

"Do you know what I am going to say?" All of them shook their heads "no" and he said "Neither do I. The service has ended. Go in peace."

The dean was not happy. "I'll give you another chance tomorrow, and you had better have a sermon." Again he stayed up all night; and again he couldn't come up with a sermon. Next morning, he stood in the pulpit and asked "Do you know what I am going to say?" The students all nodded their heads "yes." "Then there is no reason to tell you" he said. "The service has ended. Go in peace."

Now the dean was angry. "I'll give you one more chance; if you don't have a sermon tomorrow, you will be asked to leave the seminary." Again, no sermon came. He stood in the pulpit the next day and asked "Do you know what I am going to say?" Half of the students nodded "yes" and the other half shook their heads "no." The student preacher then announced "Those who know, tell those who

2

don't know. The service has ended. Go in peace.”
[What do you imagine was the response of the dean?]

The seminary dean walked over to the student, put his arm over the student's shoulders, and said “Those who know, tell those who don't know. Today, the gospel [of the Easter story] has been proclaimed.”¹

Isn't that what Easter is all about? Telling those who *don't* know what you *do* know? The Easter story of new life and resurrection is so amazing that it's hard to keep silent about it! Oftentimes we think of the Easter story as something to remember at funerals, that the dead remain in God's care and that something awaits us beyond the grave. But the Easter story is also about today—right now. How many of you have had a tragedy or loss in your life? How many of you got through the difficult time and learned that life has new possibilities? New life happens over and over again as we go through the struggles of life and somehow get through them.

But sometimes those struggles seem so overwhelming that we may miss out on the possibilities of new life, as those in the early church also experienced. The ambivalence of new life even echoes in Mark's version of the Easter story. Scholars suggest that Mark's story is the earliest account of the life of Jesus, with the later gospels of Matthew and Luke borrowing and expanding Mark's story. What's interesting in Mark's story is that it begins and ends with uncertainty.

Early Sunday morning, when Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices to anoint Jesus' body as a sign of respect, they had a question: “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

They weren't even thinking about new life, they were thinking about the logistics of how to get the stone out of the way. Now I realize planning is an important step in any event, but that's different than worrying, isn't it? Sometimes we get so overwhelmed with the stones in our lives and how

3

to roll them away that we never make it to the tomb to find out what surprise awaits us!

The stones that lie in our paths sometimes seem overwhelming. For example, for some the stone of depression seems too huge to move, creating isolation and preventing a trip to see what surprise might be at the tomb.

Others may struggle with past anger, a stone that seems impossible to move, which creates a sensation of heaviness in life that often feels unbearable.

Some may face the stone of fear, which prevents them from trusting people in their lives or from trying anything that involves taking a bit of a risk.

Economic struggles have become a huge stone for many in our nation as our economy continues to waver. Though there are signs of hope, many carry the stones of debt from mortgages, health care, and many other weights.

Maybe you're worried about moving a stone I haven't even mentioned. Maybe you've asked the

same question that the women preparing to visit the tomb asked, "Who will roll away the stone?"

In the Gospel of Mark, when the women arrived at the tomb, they discovered the stone had already been moved away, and they heard the amazing news that Jesus had been raised. They heard that they needed to go tell the rest of the disciples they would all see Jesus again. But did you notice how Mark's story ends? The women fled from the tomb in fear, "for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but the stone of fear and confusion prevented them from telling anyone what had happened!

I think that sometimes happens in our own lives. We come on Easter Sunday or any other Sunday to hear the exciting news of new life and hope, and then somehow we go back to our ordinary lives and face the heavy stones. We get

④

easily distracted by the stones of life and forget that they can be rolled away. I think the early compilers of the Bible experienced this issue in their own lives, for if you look in your Bible you may see two other endings for Mark's Gospel: a shorter one and a longer one. The compilers knew that running in fear was not the end of the story; so they added the accounts of how Jesus had appeared to the disciples and how he sent them into the world to tell others that the stones of life can be moved away.

Just imagine what would have happened if the story had ended with Mary and the others running in fear and not telling anyone. You and I would not be sitting here today celebrating the Easter story. Life would feel much different if we had not learned

about God's grace and compassion through the life of Jesus Christ.

What happens to the Easter story in your life? Do you make it to the tomb to find the stone rolled away? Do you run in fear and tell no one? Or do you continue to celebrate that even when stones appear in your life, that somehow they are moved!

May you discover not only on this Easter Sunday, but on every day, that when you face the huge stones of life, that they can be moved. And as you discover again each day that God is alive in the world, may you tell this exciting news that God still moves stones! Alleluia. Christ has risen!

¹ Steven Molin, eSermons.com.