



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

# LifeGroup Study

March 31, 2024

Luke 24:1-12

## Community

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

God has rolled away the stone, inviting us to look in and experience the wonder of the good news. God isn't surprised at our doubt, nor does God condemn it. Instead, God invites us to live in wonder, to open ourselves to the lived experience of Jesus.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

God is still rolling away stones in people's lives, stones that keep us locked in death, because God wants to bring us from death to abundant life. Those stones" may be fear, pain or even doubt. We want our small group participants to be able to identify the stones in their lives that God can roll away, bringing Easter into every day.

### INTRODUCTION

Have you heard the expression "a rolling stone gathers no moss?" In 1962, a band of British teenagers borrowed the term from a Muddy Waters song called *Rollin' Stone*, and the rest is, as they say, history. River stones are rounded and smooth because the water currents keep them moving. The movement smooths and shapes them. This is Easter weekend, and we're reminded of another stone that rolled away.

### ICEBREAKER

If you were to choose a favorite kind of stone, what would it be? Why? Many people like to collect stones and rocks. Why do you think collecting stones is interesting?

### PRAY TOGETHER

Loving God, we sometimes feel that we are locked away in a tomb behind an immovable stone. You know what this feels like because you are the One who conquered sin and death and walked out of the open tomb. We confess the despair of our own Good Fridays, and pray that you will roll our stone away. On this Easter, break through the barriers of our sin and shame, and bring your resurrection presence to our troubled hearts. We need your promise of new life and the hope of conquered death. Help us to see the open doorway to the good news of our own resurrection. Amen.

## Content

Jesus was dead and buried. In chapter 23, Luke ensures that we have no doubt about this fact. The Sabbath ends at sunset on Saturday. The women, being obedient to Sabbath law, wait until first light on Sunday to make their way to the tomb. Why the urgency? Why not wait until later in the day?

Bodies decomposed quickly in the Middle Eastern climate. The spices that the women bring to the tomb not only express their love and devotion for Jesus (in the same way that we bring flowers to a funeral) but also cover the smell of decomposition. The women also come with grief and despair; not hope or expectation.

**DISCUSSION** What do these women expect to find?

In verses 2-3, Luke introduces us to the first surprises of the morning. The women expect to see a stone across the entrance of the tomb, but they see instead that the stone has been moved. These stones were usually disc-shaped, and rolled in a groove. Based on archeological evidence, this stone likely weighed hundreds of pounds. Some say it would have weighed nearly a ton. According to Matthew, an angel of the Lord rolled this stone away.

The women also expect to find a dead body, but they find none. Throughout his Gospel, Luke delights in leading us down a road that we assume will turn left, only to find the story taking a sharp right. At this point, however, the road simply stops. We are now in totally uncharted territory!

What thoughts might be going through the minds of these women at this moment?

Not surprisingly, the women are perplexed by what they find. The Greek word used here means to be lost in doubt, even double-minded, pointing to the disparity between their expectations and the reality they encounter. They can't imagine what God is up to! Adding to the shock of the moment, suddenly two men stand by the women. Luke tells us that their clothes "gleamed like lightning," which is Luke's way of letting us know that these are not ordinary men. They're angels.

This word choice recalls the "glow" that Moses had when he came down off the mountain after being in God's presence. And now the women aren't just perplexed, they are terrified. With humility and respect, the women bow their faces to the ground, recognizing who these beings standing before them really are.

**DISCUSSION** Where else in scripture do we find accounts of angels appearing?

As if incredulous at the women's incredulity, the angels ask, "Why are you seeking the living among the dead?" That's a first-century way of saying "duh!" Jesus is not dead; he is risen. The women should have known this, because Jesus had told them as much over and over again. The angels remind the women of what Jesus had taught them, and by grace they remember and finally understand. It does make you wonder what they thought Jesus had meant!

**DISCUSSION** What do these women understand about what Jesus had told them he would do?

While the women cannot grasp the full implications of this miracle, they understand enough to rush back to the eleven disciples and share the news. But their words fall on deaf ears and grief-hardened hearts. This news is simply too good to be true. To the men, it sounds like complete nonsense, an idle tale. It is easier to believe that the women are confused, or had simply gone to the wrong tomb. Remember that women in this culture were less than second-class citizens. Jewish law prevented their testimony from being admissible in court. It is fascinating to think that the birth of Jesus was first announced to shepherds (even lower in status than women!) and the resurrection of Jesus was first announced to women. From start to finish, Luke wants us to know that this good news is for all people.

**DISCUSSION** If you were one of the disciples hearing the women's story, would you have believed them? Why or why not?

One disciple, however, races off to the tomb to see for himself if what the women had said was true. What drives Peter? Guilt? Faith? Wishful thinking (perhaps not far at all from faith!)? Sheer curiosity? We don't know. What we do know is that when he arrives at the tomb, he looks in and sees the linen burial clothes by themselves. The implication is that Jesus' body simply passed through the linens. A grave robber certainly would have taken the body and the clothes together. Peter returns home amazed by what he has seen.

**DISCUSSION** What motivates Peter to run to the tomb?

At this point in Luke's story, it appears that no one quite understands what has happened. They are amazed, confused, and left in wonderment. For Luke, it's not until the next section, the Emmaus Road experience, that the disciples fully grapple with the reality of the resurrection. The text implies that there's no need for them to feel guilt or shame because they couldn't understand or believe. In fact, the text seems to tell us that wonder is a fine first step on the journey toward faith.

**DISCUSSION** How has wonder served as a first step toward faith in your life? Give an example.

### **GOING DEEPER**

God has rolled away the stone, setting Jesus loose into the world and into our lives. If he isn't neatly wrapped up in burial clothes, he's loose in this messy world and in our messy lives, which is exactly where he longs to be. Death couldn't hold him any more than the tomb. The proclamation of the resurrection isn't just that Jesus has conquered sin and death, but that he is alive and in our midst.

**DISCUSSION** How do you see God loose and alive in the world? Where do you see God active and alive in your life? God has rolled away the stone, inviting us to look in and experience the wonder of the good news. God isn't surprised at our doubt, nor does God condemn it. Instead, God invites us to live in wonder, to open ourselves to a lived experience of Jesus.

**DISCUSSION** Is it comforting to hear that God is not surprised by our doubt? Why? How can we open ourselves up to a lived experience of Jesus, and the wonder of God in our lives?

## ***Application***

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God is still rolling away stones in our lives – stones that keep us locked in death – because God wants to bring us from death to abundant life. Those stones may be fear, pain or even doubt.

**DISCUSSION** What stone do you need rolled away so that you might become fully alive in Christ?

### **LET GOD ROLL THAT STONE AWAY!**

Commit to pray for one another's "stones" this week. Carry your river rock with you all week as a reminder that God is able, by grace, to roll your stone away.

### **PRAY TOGETHER**

God, we pray that you would roll away our stones – anything that stands in the way of your love and mercy touching us – this week. Roll away any stone that keeps us from proclaiming your good news to the world in what we say and how we live our lives. We know that you are able to roll away the stones of illness, prejudice, grief, suffering, and despair. Help us to live in wonder this week. Show us how you are alive and loose in our world, bringing redemption and reconciliation. Amen.

**Luke 24:1-12 NLT** But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. (2) They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. (3) So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. (4) As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. (5) The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? (6) He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, (7) that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." (8) Then they remembered that he had said this. (9) So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. (10) It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. (11) But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. (12) However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.