

Pastor's Message – 4/26/20
1 Peter 1:17-23
Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Did you hear the one about the two massive boulders that dropped from the sky onto a Colorado highway?

Well, not from the sky exactly. They broke off a nearby mountain and went rolling downhill, completely blocking Colorado Highway 145. No one was hurt. But no one could get through on the road until something was done.

These were no ordinary boulders. They were big. *Really big*. The largest one was big as a house.

The highway department figured they could dispatch the smaller one — the one weighing 2.3 million pounds — with dynamite. Which they did. *Boom!* Then they bulldozed the rubble away.

The larger of the two boulders — a rock weighing 8.5 million pounds — was a different matter. It would have cost nearly a quarter-million dollars to pulverize it. So, state authorities decided to take a different approach. The governor issued an executive order declaring it to be a monument. They christened it “Memorial Rock.” Then they re-routed the highway around it.

The memorial designation was a clever ploy allowing Colorado to qualify for special federal highway funding. But there's a sort of poetic justice to the governor's proclamation, all the same.

When something that big drops into the middle of our lives, causing a massive detour, it's automatically a memorial in and of itself.

A large rock has dropped into our lives too; it will be a memorial and it has caused a crisis. The coronavirus pandemic is not the first big rock, not the first memorial, not the first crisis that many of us have experienced. It is not the first crisis in the history of the world and not the first crisis in the history of the U.S. The Boston Tea Party. The Declaration of Independence. The Abolition Movement. The Civil War. The First World War. The New Deal. The Second World War. The Civil Rights Movement. The Environmental Movement. 9-11. All have been turning points. Shocks to the system. Times of decision. Crisis points. But they are no bigger than the question raised by the book of Acts: the Easter Crisis. The Easter crisis was a turning point, one that had enormous consequences for the people of Jerusalem. Not only for the people of Jerusalem, but for all people, including us.

As we have already heard over the last couple Sundays, here is Peter, standing in the streets of Jerusalem, the apostle Peter raising his voice and boldly addressing the people of Jerusalem. Peter's speech is the first public announcement of Jesus' resurrection. This message is a shock to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It's a big rock and causes a crisis.

Yes, a shock. The resurrection is a shock.

Peter spoke about “Jesus of Nazareth” and accused the Israelites of

crucifying and killing him. “But God raised him up,” he said, “having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power” (vv. 22-24).

The resurrection was successful revolt against the oppressive power of death. “This Jesus God raised up,” proclaimed Peter, “and of that all of us are witnesses” (v. 32). And having conquered death, Jesus now sits at the right hand of God in heaven. “Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (v. 36).

Jesus was killed on a cross and laid in a tomb. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and public opinion began to shift. More and more people were seeing that Jesus had conquered death and been made both Lord and Messiah.

The resurrection was a liberation movement in which God freed Jesus from death.

The resurrection was a revolution in which a crucified criminal became Lord and Messiah.

The resurrection was a grassroots rebellion in which a man from Nazareth became the right-hand man of God.

The resurrection was a promise of freedom for everyone who follows Jesus — freedom from sin, freedom from oppression, freedom from death itself.

The resurrection was a first step toward the transformation of the entire world: one in which suffering is replaced by joy, injustice is replaced by justice, violence is replaced by peace, discord is replaced by harmony, and death is replaced by everlasting life.

Yes, the resurrection does all these things, and in the process, it shakes up the established order. The resurrection creates a Crisis: the Easter Crisis. The book of Acts tells us that when the people of Jerusalem heard the words of Peter, they were “cut to the heart” (v. 37). The words of Peter created a crisis for them, throwing them into a time of intense difficulty and trouble. As they faced this crisis, they knew that they had to make an important decision — in fact, the Greek word *krisis* means “decision.” They asked Peter and the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” (v. 37).

Peter had an immediate response for them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). He challenged them to repent, which means to make a complete reversal of course and move in a new direction.

If you have been opposing Jesus, begin to support him.

If you have been the lord of your own life, begin to live for a new Lord.

If you have been serving an earthly ruler, begin to serve a heavenly Messiah.

If you have been putting faith in yourself and your own abilities, begin to put faith in Jesus and his power.

The Easter Crisis led to the rapid growth of the Christian church, from a handful of apostles to a crowd of newly baptized Christians. But instead of creating

chaos, this explosive growth was quickly organized by teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

This story from Acts reminds us that the days after the resurrection were not just a happy time in which the followers of Jesus gave thanks for the gift of the resurrection. No, the resurrection created a crisis, and the church responded by organizing itself to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the world.

We can do the same, as we adopt a crisis mentality and make a faithful response to what God is doing in the world. Our focus should be:

The apostles' teaching, such as the words of Peter: "God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Messiah" (v. 36). Jesus remains the one leader who both deserves and rewards our deepest allegiance.

Fellowship, which in Greek is *koinonia*. Within the Christian community, fellowship means sharing, contribution and spiritual communion. It is the mark of a self-giving and generous community.

The breaking of the bread. Since the best path to unity is through the stomach, we should never miss the opportunity to gather around tables for food and conversation.

The prayers. God raised Jesus up and is the power behind our new life in Christ. Our prayers keep us connected to the God who continues to raise us up and send us forward.

Today, we are experiencing a crisis — the Easter Pandemic Crisis of 2020. We have an opportunity to respond by imitating the Jerusalem Christians, who followed the risen Jesus and launched a movement that changed the world. We have an opportunity to work with God as the world and the Church is transformed into something different. We have an opportunity to respond to crisis by recommitting ourselves in our faith.

We can respond by recommitting ourselves to the seven functions of biblical community:

"S-E-R-V-I-C-E" (the seven functions of biblical community):

Spiritual Formation: We will help each other grow.

Evangelism: We desire for our neighbors to know Jesus Christ.

Recreation: We will have fun together.

Volunteerism: We will volunteer to help our church – within and beyond.

International Missions: We can reach out around the world through our apportionments.

Care: We will care for each other.

Extending Compassion: We will help the poor and needy in our community.

We can't do all these things right now as we had been doing, but we can prepare now so, when it is time, as the crisis is resolved, we're ready to do things in a different way.

The resurrection created an Easter Crisis, one that forced the people of Jerusalem to decide whether they were going to oppose Jesus or support him, whether they were going to serve an earthly king or a heavenly Messiah. The situation was unstable and uncertain as it is now, and they knew they had to choose as do we. But Peter encouraged them to make a decision for Jesus, saying that "the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (v. 39).

Like the people of Jerusalem, we know the end of the story and we can step forward in confidence and not in an attitude of fear. We are parachute people. The apostle Peter reminds us that we "were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [our] ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold ..." (v.18). Ransomed, restored and spared, we have been saved by "the precious blood of Christ" (vv. 18-19). The blood of Christ, shed on the cross, is our parachute of salvation. With it, we are on solid ground, and we are "born anew" (v. 23).

Peter's point is clear: God has provided a parachute, but it requires an element of trust. God destined Jesus to save us "before the foundation of the world" (v. 20). God's divine research and development plan put Jesus in place long before we began to spin sinfully out of control and plummet headfirst toward destruction. Just before impact, Jesus "was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake," announces Peter; Jesus came at just the right time in just the right place and slowed -- if not stopped altogether -- our descent into a life of meaninglessness, "quiet desperation," sin, postmodern malaise, rebellion, disobedience or all of the above.

Because of this, "you have come to trust in God," concludes the apostle, "who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God" (v. 21). The point of Jesus' sacrifice is not to give us a pleasant little parachute ride, but is, instead, to save us so that we will live a new and more abundant life: a life in which we trust in God and set our faith and hope in him.

In other words, the point of Christ's parachute is to send us soaring again. It's to get us back in the air and flying right -- maybe for the first time. We are in a time of crisis and have a decision to make: are we ready to trust in God, to believe that God has a plan for us and will give us everything we need to be the Church and change the world to be ready for those who are still to come and still need to hear the good news? Or will we step back in fear, giving up the abounding and unlimited grace that God offers in and through Jesus?

It is crisis time, but not a crisis that we have to fear, for it is also opportunity time, for us to watch and see and to work with God as God creates new opportunities and a new world of promise out of uncertainty. Perhaps this church, this Waupun United Methodist Church and all of our Churches, can be unmovable boulders, that stand as a sign of power: God's power that cannot be moved!