



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Who Will Roll Away the Stone - Easter Sunday- 442021***

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Please be seated.

In the year 380, when he was surrounded and located in an empire that was slowly and sadly collapsing; when travel between cities had become dangerous and people were often beset by brigands; when the church was full of disagreements and heresies, Bishop John Chrysostom preached a Paschal homily, the end of which goes like this:

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.”

Every year for the last 25 years of being a priest, I have, when it comes to Easter, begun my preparation by reading this sermon from the year 380. And over the past few weeks, I realized something that I had missed. It wasn't the fact that John believed in the resurrection. It wasn't the fact that his belief was confident. It was the fact that when he uttered these words, he was surrounded by challenges that were greater than mine, even though ours are challenges true. He was surrounded by the threat of violence. He was thrown around by the collapse of government. He was surrounded by internal debates, enemies within and enemies without, and yet John said, “Christ is risen.”

And his faith is mine. And the fact that he believed this resurrection of Christ was to me a kind of inspiration this year, because his belief is mine. And I stake my life on the resurrection of Christ. And part of the reason why I stake my life on the resurrection of Christ is because. I have seen images of the resurrection this past year. And by that, I mean, I want to say that the ancients had a kind of belief in the resurrection that was slightly different than ours.

In our contemporary times, we tend to see the resurrection as a moment that comes out of an abnormality. After something that we could never predict, an impossibility, which is somehow a possibility. But in fact, for the earliest

Christians, the resurrection was a confirmation of creation, a belief that Christ would not only be the agent of creation because He was the word out of which God spoke the world into existence, but He was also the word made flesh who died that we might live. And this meant that the resurrection went with the grain of creation. You could find images of the resurrection everywhere. You can find nature, which itself would bear witness to the resurrection. In the change of the seasons, you would find an example of how death was defeated each spring by new life.

And this is why when Jesus predicts His resurrection in the Gospel of John, He tells a parable and says, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will stay a single grain, but if it dies, it will burst and germinate and grow and multiply and there'll be much fruit and there will be abundance. Jesus is pointing to a fundamental way in which the world works, but one that is sometimes hidden from our eyes. And the faith that you and I need to claim this Easter day, the faith that we need to lift up, the faith that we need to protect like a flame in the wind is this belief that in spite of the disease that we are battling with in spite of the pandemic, which has caused us so much loneliness, in spite of the death that we have been dealing with, in spite of the disarray and upset and tumult and hate that we have been dealing with, that God has given us faith in Christ's resurrection, and that faith will not disappoint us. And that love that Christ showed us in the resurrection is everlasting. Life will be changed, but it will not end. And we will all be raised as He was raised. Hallelujah.

So you and I have a task before us today. There is no argument I can give you of the resurrection. There is no concept or system that I can share with you that can make this easier. What I ask for you today is belief. You have to believe in the Resurrection. But that is not a step into absurdity. That's not asking you to believe something that is out of an abnormality. It's rather to see and look around you and to see the evidence of things moving from death to life, and to realize that it's in that, that we find the inspiration and the witness to Christ's resurrection.

And you see this even in today's gospel. I've been reading the Gospel of Mark for more than 25 years and I saw something this week that I've missed for many years. And that is that the main character of this passage is not the women who go to the tomb. It's not the angel who is sitting by the side and bears witness to the Resurrection. It's not Peter who is offstage. It's not Jesus Himself, who is no longer there and almost missing in action. It's the stone. The stone tells you everything. Because the stone is the signal to the reader that the women are about to experience profound transformation because on their way to the tomb they ask who will move the stone? When they get to the tomb, they discover that the stone has already been moved away.

It's in that moment that they begin to step into eternity. It's in that moment that they begin to see the resurrection face to face and the awesome and terrifying revelation that Christ is risen. In the same way, you and I need to notice the stones that have been rolled away in our midst. I know that that stone has taken a different form and shape in each of your lives. In each of your lives, there's been a moment in which you have been given an opening to go into the tomb and discover that Christ is raised.

That tomb might be death and someone you know, and love who has died this past year, either from COVID or by just the normal processes of life. It might be disease. It might be the pandemic itself. It might be the economic insecurity that you have felt. It might be the loneliness that you have worked in and the incredible sacrifice that our children have had to make so that their grandparents might live. It might be the isolation so many of us feel in all of those places where we have been pushed to the limit, when we have worked hard to begin again, when we have had to learn to love again, when we have had to learn to forgive again, again. That is the stone in front of the tomb. And that stone has been moved by God.

So go into the tomb and see the resurrection believe and stake your life on Christ so that you can say as one great saint did, in the face of violence and uncertainty, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen."