

Mark's version of the resurrection story just might be the most perfect one for a celebration of the resurrection in the midst of a pandemic. It seems not quite finished. It points us to the hope of the risen Jesus. But we never actually see the risen Jesus in Mark's gospel.

In the other 3, we do. In John's gospel, Mary Magdalene meets him in the garden, and he appears to all the disciples as they are huddled in fear in a locked room. He even cooks fish for them on the lakeshore.

In Matthew's gospel, the risen Jesus meets the disciples on a mountaintop and commissions them for service to the gospel.

In Luke's story Jesus appears to a couple of followers on a dusty road to Emmaus, and then appears to all the disciples as they are listening to the story.

Mark doesn't have any of that.

In the other three gospels, nothing is said about the women's concern about the stone. They just get to the tomb and it's been rolled away.

Here, the three women are concerned about that stone. They are heading off on an urgent mission. Traditionally, when someone died, the body was washed right away, anointed with oil and spices, wrapped in cloths and buried right away – same day, usually in a family tomb.

Jesus, however, was executed 90 miles away from his family and his family's tomb. He was executed as a traitor in an unsettled dangerous time. And he died in the afternoon just a couple hours before the sundown on the sabbath. There was no time to prepare his body properly, and he certainly couldn't be taken 90 miles to be buried in his hometown.

His body was wrapped and buried hastily in a borrowed tomb. Now, in the early morning after the Sabbath, the women hurry to do for him what they couldn't on Friday. They round up their spices and oils and off they go.

But that stone is a concern.

Who will roll away the stone? That question weighs on the women as they hurry to Jesus' tomb.

Mark makes sure to mention it's a big stone. Thing is, Joseph of Arimathea apparently rolled it into the opening of the tomb by himself.

Most modern-day pictures of the tomb show a big round disc-shaped stone in front of the tomb's opening carved into the rocks. It might have been like that, but based on archeological

finds, those were actually pretty rare. More common would have been a blocky boulder type stone that acted more like a cork.

That could be rolled into place by one person, but once lodged in the entry, it would be very hard to move. The women's concern is legit.

Who will roll away the stone?

There's no evidence they ever came up with an answer to that question. Unsure of what exactly they would do, they just kept moving toward the tomb.

When they got there, they discovered they didn't need to worry...it was already rolled away. So, step one of their mission complete.

The question they didn't think to ask is whether Jesus would be there. But instead of a dead Jesus, there's a man dressed in white with a message. And although Mark doesn't say it, messengers in white are angels.

The man says, He is not here. He has been raised.

Stunned, they stand there holding their spices and oil, eyes wide, hands over their mouths in shock.

The angel doesn't even give them time to process it. Go get the disciples, especially Peter, and head to Galilee. Jesus will meet up with you there.

But the women, just barely beginning to grasp that something astonishing had happened, ran away in fear and amazement, and were too afraid to tell anyone.

Of course, we know that the story did get out. They must have eventually told the disciples and Jesus did meet up with them.

But Mark doesn't tell that part of the story...he leaves it hanging. Why?

This bothered early scribes so much that a couple of them added endings. Most Bibles will show those endings, but they'll almost always be in parentheses with a footnote that says they were not part of the original manuscript.

Some scholars have thought Mark did write more, but his ending was lost.

Most now believe he intended to end it that way. Why?

Well, it seems Mark's story was for people who knew the life of faith doesn't always come with neatly tied up endings and easy answers.

Let's go back to the first question – who will roll away the stone?

The women set out on an urgent mission...they did not know what they would do about the stone, but they went anyway.

That's what stepping out in faith often looks like.

You start off, headed toward where you think God is leading you. Along the way, questions come up...

How will this work? What if I get there and it all falls apart?

Who will roll away the stone?

Then you do get there, and it turns out God has rolled the stone away...God has been faithful to you.

But then the whole thing doesn't really turn out the way you expected.

Now what?

Then God reveals the next step...Go to Galilee and there you will meet Jesus. Most of the time, we don't get a shocking reveal like the women at the tomb got. It's more like a sense of invitation...a next step... that emerges out of the fog.

And so, wherever our Galilee is, off we go. But then new questions start arising. What about this obstacle or that obstacle? This just isn't practical. Who will roll the stone away?

Then we get there and still all our questions aren't answered. But we get the next thing to do.

The life of faith does not come with all the certainty and well-laid out plan that we often want. Instead it comes with questions and worries and potential obstacles...who will roll away the stone?

In the midst of all that's going on right now, faith grounds us and gives us a direction. Sometimes we get a murky idea of where to step next. Maybe we'll read something or hear something about some kind of help that is needed, and we can say...OK...I can do that. That's my next step. But we still don't get all the answers.

We live toward the promise of life, even when we can't see a neat ending.

Who will roll away this stone? How will it get rolled away?

We don't know. Trusting that somehow we'll figure it out, we move through, doing our part to protect life and find hope and joy in the midst of a difficult situation.

In the midst of all the current uncertainty, we can hang on to this story of Jesus' resurrection. Who will roll the stone away? Early in the morning on that first Easter, three women discovered that God rolled the stone away.

And although the risen Jesus doesn't show up in Mark's gospel, the promise is there. "Go to Galilee and Jesus will meet you there."

The story ends on hope, not certainty. It's a story of uncertain, even anxious next steps. But with each step we learn that God is faithful.

Each time we experience that faithfulness of God, we can go a little further. Along the way, Questions still arise...who will roll away the stone?

We listen back to these ancient words from that first Easter...Who will roll away the stone? God will.