

*FIRST ROCK FROM THE SON*

John 20:1-18

Remember the TV show “Third Rock from the Sun?” The name, of course, is derived from the planet Earth’s third position from the sun. It is the “third rock from the sun.” In the show, actor John Lithgow is the leader of an expedition of aliens, and assumes the human body and identity of Dick, the patriarch of the Solomon family, and a professor of physics at an Ohio university.

Please don’t read what I’m saying this morning as an attempt to suggest a parallel between Jesus and John Lithgow! But I am struck that, while Jesus visited this third rock from the sun, and took on human form and nature, it was Mary and Peter and John who, on that great resurrection morning, encountered the first rock from the Son (as in, the 1<sup>st</sup> rock from the Son of God, huh?) And the rock was not where it was supposed to be!

They came to the garden tomb expecting to be but one rock from the Son. And they expected to find the stone in place. See, they had already stumbled through a field of rocks on their spiritual pilgrimage to the Son of God:

- The rock of unbelief
- the rock of misplaced enthusiasm
- the rock of little faith
- the rock of clouded understanding
- the rock of confusion
- the rock of disappointment . . .

So that until now, they fully expected to be at the first rock from the Son, the stone itself. When they arrived at the tomb, they discovered that the first rock from the Son had been rolled away, and was positioned just as it had been before Jesus’ burial.

But it was not done so as to enable a revived Jesus to walk through a gaping hole. The glorified Jesus in a morphing, molecular restructuring that is beyond our comprehension, was no longer limited by closed doors, thick walls, or stone-sealed sepulchers.

No, the earthquake shook the rocks, and the rock rolled so that all could see that the tomb was, indeed, *empty*. The first rock from the Son was a visible reminder of the resurrection power of God.

God is in the rock removal business. In the grip of COVID-19, huddled in our homes, fearful of what is becoming of the world economy, not to mention what's becoming of our own, forced to be apart for Easter services, of all things, it is easy to let the rock roll back in front of the tomb. It is easy for our lives to be sealed off to the evidence of resurrection and new life. It is easy to let the rock settle with a thud, barring us from enjoying the visible evidence of God's presence in and between us.

You may be one rock from the Son. Your spiritual pilgrimage has taken you afar and brought you many rewards. But there may still be a sense of incompleteness. You have already tossed aside many rocks with the help of God, family, and friends. These "rocks" have become the visible evidence of spiritual growth in your life.

- you have rolled away the rock of indifference
- you have rolled away the rock of arrogance
- you have rolled away the rock of guilt
- you have rolled away the rock of insecurity
- you have rolled away the rock of misunderstanding
- you have rolled away the rock of an unforgiving spirit.

You've been rockin' and rollin,' and I mean that seriously. You're a growing, faithful person who takes seriously the call of God in your life.

And now you stand at the first rock from the Son. You really feel that you're not there yet. You really feel that but for this one rock, you can experience the resurrection power of the Risen Christ! There's just one rock between you and the resurrected life Jesus has for you.

And you're in good company. The apostle Paul felt the same way. "Not that I have already reached the goal," he explains in Philippians 3. His goal is no less than Christ and the power of His resurrection" (again, that's Philippians 3:10.)

What, then, is this rock which stands in the way? For Paul, it was his cultural pedigree and pride.

For you? I don't know, and there's a good chance you may not, either. Our sins, yours and mine, church adherents of longstanding, our sins, the things that keep us from God, are more of omission, than of commission, what we haven't done—or do not do—rather than acts that we do and can identify. But sometimes just a simple reading of scripture can identify them to us. The Holy Spirit has a way of making God's ways and will clear to us from the Bible itself. The Spirit makes it God's truth to us, and it starts to reveal us to ourselves, again, right?

A man named Bob Buford found out. Buford, CEO of Buford Television, Inc, and founder of Leadership Network, talks about his journey to the on in his book *Halftime*. For him, the first rock from the Son, the final impediment between him and a meaningful life that had Holy Spirit to it, was the tremendous success he was experiencing in his life. But while he had success, something was missing. His book is the story of his journey from a life of success to a life of significance.

He compares his life to a football game. In the first half he had been preoccupied with achieving the material goals he had. This quest required that he relegate to second place, if not third, fourth or fifth, other components of his life: family, friends, church, and God.

As he approached mid-life, he took some time off, and during a reflective period of self-assessment, asked himself a lot of questions. What emerged from his halftime was a different strategy for the second half of life.

I think most of us could benefit to observe a halftime. And maybe Easter Sunday is the time to start. Our journey has brought us here to the first rock from the Son; for the Apostle, his cultural and religious heritage; for Buford, his phenomenal success. Perhaps for you and me, too, our successes have been too much of a good thing, have been a rock blocking us from our Lord.

Now, I'm not talking about the phenomenal successes of a businessman like Buford, nor the spiritual achievements of an Apostle. Maybe just self-satisfaction might be that barrier. Self-satisfaction: I'm a good person; I had reasonable success in my job or in my marriage. I'm proud of my children. Life has been pretty good, all things considered.

So, yeah, maybe just the successes that bring me satisfaction have rolled the barrier rocks in front of the tomb of my life that wants to open. And I think Easter Sunday is the time to start. Our journey has brought us here to the first rock from the Son: but is closed off because of those barrier rocks.

Bob Buford reminds us that we need to shift gears and recognize the importance of *Spiritual* significance. And it's not that we have never understood significance as the important thing; it's just that we may have simply taken the wrong path to find it. The path of success was thought to provide all the self-fulfillment, self-realization, and all the other selfisms that success could offer.

When we stand at an impasse at this first rock that separates us from the Son, so close to Son Significance, we realize that meaning just cannot be found in the *self*. Augustine said once that we should seek not Self as the True Good, but to seek the True Good of the Self which, he said, is God.

That's the difference between the first half and the second half of our lives (and those halves may not be chronologically equal): you or I may have lived our

whole lives till now in the first half of life, which was dedicated to self, but now the second half allows the stone to roll away and leads us out of our death to be become overcome by love, and significance, and resurrection.

So, the halftime, the time-out we need to take, is to identify that sin or those (usually recurring) sins, that have been barriers in front of the empty tomb, barriers to the living and life-giving Jesus. And then, once identified, asked forgiveness for them. No, we don't make up for them, nor make them right. We just can't. But Christ, the newness of our life, *can* take them away, can't He? He can roll that rock away from our deadness and lead us into life. . . . the second half of our lives, the life of significance, a life arisen to the life of God, a life significant to someone around you who might still have their rocks rolled away, and live again, too, from what you do for them and do around them.

This is resurrection isn't it? This is Easter.

Amen.