

The Way x06. Sunday 10 February_2019.

MARKER STONES ON THE WAY: The Tomb Stone and *who will roll the stone away...the stone of resurrection.*

READ: JOHN 14: 1 – 7 and Mark 16: 1 - 8.

We aim to see through our study and reflection on Scripture this year a clear thread of teaching and revelation about God showing **a way forward and a way through that we can follow.**

There are prophecies in the **OT** about this and in the early Church “*the Way*” became a title describing followers of Jesus - before the term Christian was used. So, we read of men and women who “*belonged to the Way*” (*Acts 9:2; 22:4*) Jesus’ own claim in response to questions that he is the Way to the Father God.

In Scripture, there is abundant advice for the path in life which will provide the most meaning and fulfillment. Our path refers to *the way* we live and what we decide to do with our limited time on earth.

We enter the 150th anniversary of the church of VPBC with the knowledge that even though we step into a season of transition and change we have the Light of God with us to guide us in the way that we should go: *Psalms 119: 105 Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.*

TODAY: 2 passages of Scripture.

The first passage in **John 14** is the significant passage where Thomas and Philip show that they are still confused about Jesus’ true identity (even having spent 3 years with Jesus). In this encounter not long before his death Jesus declares that he is ***The Way to the Father*** and uses the metaphor of life after death as the Believer entering God’s house and dwelling with rooms ready prepared for us. We are the guest invited (not just to a banquet) but rather to live in the house of God’s dwelling permanently. (Life after death in Jesus’ explanation involves both place and relationship with God).

The second passage from **Mark 16** tells the story following the death and entombment of Jesus of the women going out after the Sabbath, on the Sunday morning with their spices to the tomb where they had seen Jesus buried by Joseph of Arimathea. (Those named are Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Salome). ***Vv3,4. On the way they said to one another, Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back.***

SO, WE COME TO ANOTHER MARKER STONE “ON THE WAY” – the large stone put in front of Jesus’ tomb – to stop grave robbers, or scavenging animals or over enthusiastic Followers of Jesus from getting into the tomb. The tomb stone was not there to stop Jesus getting out – there was no chance of that as he’d been certified as dead. The tomb stone marked finality and a Roman seal had even been placed on it to

bar anyone from entering without express permission because the fear was that the Disciples might steal the body of Jesus and fake some sort of “rising from the dead”. *Matthew 27:66* The seal was sign of authentication that the tomb was occupied, and the power and authority of Rome stood behind the seal. Anyone found breaking the Roman seal would suffer the punishment of an unpleasant death.

Last Sunday – MARKER STONES. There is a long and ancient history of placing stones and cairns **both to mark the way or act as some sort of witness** – all over the world.

Discovering the Way is also about recognizing particular points on the journey and also that these events are significant to us and also tell a story – they bear witness to others that see the marker stones and they remind us.

I wonder what are the marker stones in your life and history? Between the marker stones of “birth” and “death” – what other stones would be placed in the intervening years and events?

- **“MIZPAH”** - is a name from the Bible. It is mostly used to refer to a place near Gilead (*Judges 11.29*). Its first usage (*Gen 31.49-50*) refers to it as a pillar of stones set up by Jacob and Laban. The pillar of stones acted as **a witness** to the bond between the two men – where treachery and lying had been involved as well as promises. *“May the LORD keep an eye on us (watch over us to see if we live lives of justice) while we are separated from each other”*. **A pile of stones set there to remind them of what they had promised to one another.** (McNie gravestone – “Mizpah”).

In addition to trail markers, cairns are built for **burial monuments**, ceremonial purposes, hunting successes and so on. They mark a “monumental” happening. They range in size from small stone markers to artificial hills. We've built pyramids and castles with stones and painstakingly cleared them out of farm fields, using them to build low dry-stone walls for fencing. ... These **piles** are NOT true cairns, the official term for deliberately **stacked rocks**. From middle Gaelic, the word means “**mound of stones built as a memorial or landmark.**”

- **“Ebenezer”**- stone of help *1 Samuel 7: 12 Then Samuel took a stone, set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and said, “The LORD has helped us all the way”--and he named it “Stone of Help.”*

So, JESUS’ body was placed in a tomb hewn from the rock and a great stone – was rolled (down a groove) in front of it. Some stones were cut like plugs or stoppers and pushed in but this one it seems was rolled there. It had taken 2 men at least to roll it down the gradient and therefore the women were suddenly unsure as to who would open the tomb for them.

The Gospel account of *Matthew 28: 2* tells us that there was an earthquake and an **angel of the LORD rolled away the stone** and showed an empty tomb to the women. Earlier in *Matthew 27: 52* he speaks of how at Jesus death the curtain in the Temple

was torn from top to bottom and also graves had broken open and dead people were raised and came into the city of Jerusalem some days after Jesus was raised. All out of the ordinary strange occurrences.

The stone that marked Jesus death and brought closure and finality – a tomb stone came to mark the power of Resurrection.

The women were alarmed and confused. The angel told them Jesus had been raised. From seeking the dead Jesus they came to believe in the living Jesus. The male disciples initially simply thought that the women were distressed and confused.

Do you know what it's like to discover that what you were told as a child about death and live, heaven and hell is totally inadequate?

Then there can be the exciting discovery that the Bible says so much more than we were told.....I have had many such moments.

Read: *The dead in Christ will rise first: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18 p258 TEV) esp. v16*

Stanley Spencer – “The Resurrection, Cookham” churchyard. (By Thames)

