

Easter Sunday
April 17, 2022

Then the stone moved, the earth shakes and birds start singing; the sun shines, the earth warms, for new life it's bringing. These are the words of the chorus of a song I learned fifty years ago, in a youth choir in a small Baptist Church in a small town in Arkansas. The name of that song is **The Night Before Easter**, written by the late Donnie Sumner, singer, songwriter; and it is part of the inspiration for our reflection today. What is it about the movement of a stone that is so important, that it is brought out by all four Gospels writers? Was this movement simply to allow Jesus to leave the tomb?

“The stone moved . . . “The Apostle Matthew tells it this way: *Suddenly, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.* Matthew has given us more information than the other three Gospels (such as today's Gospel passage); but the movement of the stone is, in each case, a point that stands out. In Jesus' time, a stone rolled across the entrance of a tomb--just as the closing of a coffin in our time—signaled the finality of death. Yet, Jesus has predicted his rising no less than six times.

For just a moment let us move a little further forward on the time-line of Jesus' Resurrection. Luke's Gospel brings us the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, in which Jesus meets and talks with these two men as they journeyed along the road. Scripture tells us, *Then their eyes were opened; and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.* John's Gospel speaks of two occasions when the disciples were behind closed and locked doors and *Jesus came and stood among them.*

Something new, something different has happened. Jesus' resurrection was about the coming of new life. This was, in the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the “last and highest ‘evolutionary leap’ . . . the union of the finite with the infinite . . . the union of man and God” (from *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*). This is where we find the new, the different beginning. Jesus—the risen Jesus—the glorified Jesus—did not need the stone to be moved any more than He needed the doors to be unlocked. The stone rolled away meant that the stones of sin, doubt, and disbelief had now been cleared, opening the path to salvation for all of mankind.

The last verse of the song that began our reflection says: *The king of all ages, the giver of life, for a moment lies silent and still. But a power sent from heaven comes breaking the night, and death must bow to his will.* The stone has been rolled away—**HE IS RISEN.**