

“Stone-Rolling and Doom-Scrolling”

Mark 16:1-8

My wife, Danette, checks her social media a lot. When we're watching a perfectly good football or basketball game on T.V, she has the ability to completely ignore the T.V. with her face buried in her cell phone for the whole game. When it was third and ten on the Browns last possession of the season, she asked me to listen to some gloom and doom on Facebook. I was watching the Browns who were about to lose. I didn't need anymore doom and gloom. But there's always next season. There's always new life.

The problem with this habit is that it can lead to higher stress. We think that keeping up with the latest news will lessen our anxiety, but it increases it. Instead of making us feel safer, it raises our level of fear, anxiety, and stress.

So, does this sound familiar? Are you experiencing this in your own life? Do you get into bed, turn off the lights, and glance at your phone just one more time? Wanting to stay informed, you end up being sucked into doom and gloom.

Doom-scrolling. According to *NPR*, this binging on bad news is eroding our mental health. But we are not the first to experience this. Journalists admit that they have been doing it for years, and the three women who visited the tomb on Easter morning were some of the very first doom-scrollers.

Mark tells us that when the Sabbath was over, “Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus]. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb” (16:1-2).

What were they feeling? Doom and gloom. Their Messiah had been killed in a humiliating death on a cross. His body had been laid in a cave-like tomb, and a large stone had been rolled against the door. They were feeling grief over the death of Jesus, stress about the future, and anxiety about how they would remove the stone.

As they were walking along, they had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (v. 3). Anxiety is a feeling of fear or apprehension about what is to come, and that’s exactly what the women were experiencing. Minute by minute, their mental health was eroding. But when they arrived, “they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back” (v. 4).

Their doom-scrolling was met by an act of stone-rolling. Finally, some good news!

But as “they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed” (v. 5). They didn’t expect to see anyone, so they were startled. The man said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised” (v. 6). Their doom-scrolling had been focusing them on bad news, but the words of the young man gave them reason to hope.

Then the man ordered them to go “tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (v. 7). The young man changed their focus from doom and gloom to a new possibility for the future. He promised them that Jesus was going ahead of them, and that they would see him in Galilee.

So, the women fled the tomb, filled with terror and amazement. Since negative emotions can be hard to overcome, Mark admits that “they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (v. 8). Yes, the fear that had been gripping them was not easy to throw off. It took time. And what was true for them is also true for us.

You can turn off Twitter. But escaping doom and gloom is not that simple.

Experts say that the solution to doom-scrolling is to break out of the “vicious cycle of negativity.” That’s the message for the women and for us, when we see large stones in our path and feel alarmed. The good news of Easter is that God has acted in our lives to break the cycle of negativity. We are invited today to see that the stone has already been rolled back, to believe that Jesus has been raised, and to focus on the future where our risen Lord is ahead of us and waiting for us.

For starters, the stone is gone, the barrier has been broken down. Most of us have fears about the future, and we often focus on worst-case scenarios. This was what the women were doing as they approached the tomb, fixating on the enormous stone that they feared was going to block them from entering the tomb and anointing the body of Jesus.

But guess what? Fear is always worse than reality. “Our brains are crazy. Every day they lie to us about how terrible things are or how bad they’re going to be, but when we finally ignore the fear [we] realize everything’s pretty much okay, the world will keep turning, and we’re going to survive.”

Yes, the world will keep turning, and God will keep working. The women were so afraid of the stone that they never dreamed that God would take action to roll it away. Their brains were lying to them about how terrible things were and how bad things were going to be. But then God replaced their doom-scrolling with stone-rolling.

God will do the same for you. So, don't let your brain convince you that the stone you fear will always stand in your way. Maybe you are anxious about something at school or work or home. Perhaps you are fearful of failure or loneliness or a health issue. Don't let your brain lie to you. Since God is always at work, fear is worse than reality.

Next, open your eyes and see that Jesus is no longer dead. The young man in the tomb sensed that the women were not going to believe what he was saying, so he invited them to see for themselves. Jesus "is not here," said the man. "Look, there is the place they laid him" (v. 6).

Jesus is not here, dead in the tomb. See for yourself. Instead, he is alive in people who are showing his grace, his love, his forgiveness, his healing, and his justice. Jesus is alive and well whenever a stranger is welcomed, a child is loved, a friend is forgiven, a patient is healed, and an injustice is made right.

The hymn "Christ Is Alive!" was written by a pastor named Brian Wren for Easter Sunday 1968, just 10 days after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was assassinated. Wren wanted to acknowledge this terrible loss while also proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

"Christ is alive!" he wrote. "Let Christians sing. The cross stands empty to the sky. Let streets and homes with praises ring. Love, drowned in death, shall never die."

Yes, a terrible crime had been committed on the cross. An awful injustice had been done. But now the cross was empty, and love would never die.

The hymn makes clear that the resurrection is not stuck in history, but a reality at every time. The risen Christ, says Brian Wren, is “saving, healing, here and now, and touching every place and time.” Jesus comes into contact with human suffering whenever it is experienced. In the face of today’s racism and violence, Jesus “suffers still, yet loves the more.” The hymn then ends with the good news of “justice, love and praise.”

Truly, Jesus is not dead in the tomb. Instead, he is found in his followers who act with justice, love, and praise. Open your eyes, and see that Jesus is alive and well in you, and in the people around you.

Finally, we are challenged to look to the future, not to the past. Our risen Lord Jesus is not simply *with* us — he is *ahead* of us, always ahead of us, calling us into the future that he is preparing for us. Our job is to figure out where Jesus is leading us, and to follow him there.

Doom-scrolling traps us in a vicious cycle of negativity that fuels our anxiety. “Our minds are wired to look out for threats. The more time we spend scrolling, the more we find those dangers, the more we get sucked into them, the more anxious we get.” But what if we replaced a vicious cycle with a virtuous cycle? What if we turned away from threats and looked for possibilities? This is what Jesus was doing by moving ahead of his disciples to Galilee, and what he is doing by going ahead of us today. Jesus is rolling away stones and calling us forward.

Let's move toward new possibilities for deeper connections with family members and friends, new possibilities for vital ministry and mission in the church, and new possibilities for justice and righteousness in our community and nation.

We don't have to focus on doom and gloom. Not with the stone rolled away and our Lord calling us forward.

May the peace of God . . .