

It must have been heavy. Huge, even. Enormous. Immoveable. Unchangeable.

John only records that “a stone was lying against” the tomb. But it must have been a big, bad stone, dividing Lazarus and his family; keeping the living away from the dead; a rock functioning as a wall, a boulder lain as a closed door, an impassable barrier between the two sides of life and death.

On the life side stand Mary and Martha, their weeping companions, the disciples, and Jesus, himself full of grief. On the death side rests Lazarus, deceased four days, decaying by now in the tomb, the stench already present.

Death had done its work here. For isn't death's work always dividing? Isn't it death's power to separate, to tear people apart, to keep the living over here and put the dead over there, to create a chasm between them and us?

When we as the church put ourselves into this story, we typically position ourselves with Mary and Martha outside the tomb on the side of the living, grieving what and those we've lost.

And when we imagine where Jesus is, it looks like Jesus is outside the tomb, standing with Mary and Martha and the weeping and the disciples.

But, of course, Jesus is also inside the tomb with Lazarus. Tomb, stone, grieving women, linen wrappings, even a face cloth . . . we will see these elements again, in Jesus' own life. Jesus is with Lazarus too, or perhaps it's more familiar to say that *Lazarus* is with Jesus, because for the living, the dead

*are* with Jesus. The saints are at rest in Christ, feasting at the banquet of the Lamb, on the other side of the grave, with God.

But let us not forget that Jesus is on the side of the living, too. Here, in John's story, Jesus is on the side of the big, heavy, immovable stone, moved by grief, standing with the living, ready for resurrection.

Because Jesus has come, after all, to roll away the stone. Jesus has come for the living and the dead. Christ is the Lord of death *and* resurrection. The Light of the World that no darkness can overcome. The One who gave his life to open for us the way of everlasting life.

And that everlasting life—life with Jesus—exists on both sides of the grave. Jesus is eternal life not only for those at rest but also for those of us here. Jesus gives resurrected life not just for those gone before us but also for those among us now. On both sides of the grave Jesus lives for and with us.

Which means that, because of Jesus, both sides have become no sides. Because there is one ruler of heaven and earth, one body for the living and the dead, one life shared between the church on earth and the hosts of heaven.

“Take away the stone,” Jesus says in our Gospel story, and with a single command, all that would divide and work death among us blows away. In a single rising, Jesus overcomes death's power of separation and division, banishes “us versus them” thinking, rolls away the stone, and makes us one.

This triumph over death, this togetherness of the living and the dead, this binding what the world rends apart . . . this is what we celebrate today. And I don't just mean on All Saints Sunday. That Jesus has overcome death and the grave and has united the living and dead and drawn together what the world and its sin would always tear apart . . . we celebrate that every Sunday, because we celebrate that every time we gather around the table.

The table: where with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we sing the unending hymn of praise to God. The table: where, because on this day, Christ overcame death and the grave, and opened for us the way to everlasting life. The table: where every Sunday Christ bids *everyone* to come, and the holy, catholic, apostolic church gathers across time and space.

At the table Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again, so the distinction between past, present, and future loses its everyday hold on us. At the table, the communion of the saints, where the saints commune. All the saints. Living and dead. Both sides becoming no sides.

Which is why today at communion, we will read a list of saints who have died. Because the stone only gets a passing mention in John's story. Because the powers of death and destruction and division have not and do not and will not win. Because Christ came for the dead *and* the living. For our life together. For life eternally. For life resurrected. For both sides and for no more sides.

AMEN.