

## EASTERTIDE WEEK READING

### Rocks that talk!

By Dorothy Nickel Friesen

As a farm girl, one of the spring tasks was picking up rocks from our Minnesota acreage. Before we planted soybeans and corn, the black loam needed to be cleared of rocks. It seemed that the winter snows and then spring thaws had yielded a crop of stones, some easily picked up and then there were the occasional larger ones that required two hands—or a Dad! In any case, the rocks were moved away.

The incredible story from Matthew's gospel (chapter 28) is slightly different from the other three Gospels. It was only two women (Mary Magdalene and the "other" Mary) who got the shock of their lives. An earthquake happened at the tomb where Jesus was buried. The rocks were rolled away by a dazzling angel. Rocks moved with the power of the earth shaking. What was supposed to be a quiet tomb, filled with a dead body, suddenly was opened! And the first words from the angel were, "Do not be afraid!"

I will confess that I would have been terrified. An earthquake in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still very frightening. I am scientifically informed about earthquakes including what measures to take to protect myself. Yet in the first century, surely the shaking earth would have been extremely scary. Run away! Run fast! Get away now! But the scripture interrupts the fear syndrome with a word of hope, of truth, of instruction! "Don't just stand there! Jesus is going to Galilee. Go there! Tell the disciples! Now, go, quickly!"

As Christians who have learned and told the resurrection story many times, we still wonder about this incredible event. How big was the tomb? Where did the angel come from? Did the women follow the instructions? What did Jesus look like? Did the chief priests think that Jesus' body had been stolen, and fear for their lives? These, and other questions, are modern queries. We want details; we want proof; we want assurance that the women were not dreaming nor hysterical.

All of us need reassurance that our faith is foundational. We read the Bible. We pray. We worship the triune God. We share our faith through our service, witness, and gifts. Yet, we all run into "rocks that talk." Some of the "rocks" prevent us from speaking out about God's mercy. Some of the "rocks" warn us that taking a stand for justice could cause us to suffer discrimination, even injury, even death. Some of the "rocks" are our own fears, hesitations, and cowardice. In this season of pandemic, we are confronted with real and imaginary obstacles. What are the "rocks" saying to you today?

On the other hand, many of us can point to "angels" who have encouraged us, taught us, mentored us, and supported us. My aunt was a seventh grade Sunday School teacher who connected the Bible story with our ancestors leaving Russia because of pacifist convictions. Our pastor baptized me with the assurance that my questions about Bible verses were not ones of doubt but of healthy faith development. College and seminary professors prodded me to dig deeper in my research and think creatively about living out a justice-filled life. A senior high student once asked, "How come you're good to me who just flunked your class?" When I was sick, "angels" brought me food, provided friendship, and sent notes of cheer. An encouraging email lifted my sagging spirits.

This Easter, reflect on the "stones" in your life, the "angels" who ministered to you, and then be encouraged to say, "Don't be afraid! There is good news! Rocks talk—and they can be rolled away as

you make disciples of all nations! There is a wonderful promise: Jesus is always with you! Do not be afraid!"

*Dorothy Nickel Friesen, a retired pastor and denominational minister, is Board chair of SPRINGS FORTH! FAITH FORMATION, INC. which publishes online, multiage curriculum. The newest product is GOD ROCKS! which features the Matthew 28 text.*