

“Old Beginnings *or* New Beginnings?”
Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

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Jesus is crucified on a Friday and dies Friday afternoon. He is placed in a nearby tomb before sundown. Saturday, of course, is the sabbath so no one can go to check on Jesus' remains until Sunday.

But at first light on Sunday, the two Mary's go to the tomb. Just as they arrive there is an earthquake, and the large stone that had been placed across the tomb rolls away. They look and see an angel sitting on the stone. Remember, we've mentioned this before. This is the Ancient World. They didn't have Pic 'n Save where you could buy a gallon of bleach. Anyone dressed in clothes as white as snow has to be some sort of divine being.

The angel's first words are, “Do not be afraid.” He explains that Jesus has been raised from the dead and charges the women to go and tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee.

The women run off to do so when they meet Jesus. Jesus, too, tells them not to be afraid and to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.

So, the disciples make the trip north up to Galilee. I wonder what they were thinking as they were making their way. Did they have a vision for the future? Were they kicking around some old ideas? Did they see themselves spending the rest of their days fishing on the Sea of Galilee? Hauling in nets and hanging out with Jesus? Were they planning a new community, like the Essenes had near the Dead Sea? Starting a new community and observing a higher purity with Jesus as their temple? Or maybe they had visions of collecting an army and swooping down on Jerusalem to drive out the Romans!

We don't know what they thought. The text doesn't say. But they must have been hashing over some old favorites.

Imagine their surprise, then, when Jesus charges them with something utterly new. He is giving them a genuinely New Beginning. Jesus sends them out to evangelize.

It's hard for us to appreciate how radically new this is. Evangelizing, proselytizing, converting others to your religion just wasn't done in the Ancient World. Pagans didn't go from place to place, trying to convert other pagans to their gods. We don't read about Israelites going on missionary journeys to spread the good news of Judaism. It just didn't happen.

Jesus, then, is calling the disciples to do a radically new thing, a genuinely new thing. He is calling them to begin something they have never done before. A truly NEW beginning.

Jesus' resurrection has many profound consequences. One of those consequences is in Jesus, we can do things we never could have imagined. We can be fundamentally different. We can have a genuinely NEW Beginning.

Most of the time, what we call new beginnings are really old beginnings. Say we get a new job, a new house, a new spouse. We change our circumstances and think we're doing something new. We think we're making a new beginning.

But unless we ourselves radically change, unless we ourselves pursue something genuinely new, we're only recreating the old setting, the old thing. We get a new house, but we keep the old habits and soon we're just as unhappy as we used to be. We get a new job but we carry our old self with us, and soon we're just as frustrated as we used to be. We get a new spouse, but we keep on having the same old arguments. What could have been a new beginning is just old.

As we all know, today is my last day with you. In June, I will begin a new call in Ohio. I say it will be new, but will it? If I go there with the same old attitude, the same old ideas, the same old approach to what I've been doing, will it be a new beginning? Or an old beginning?

You, my beloved, are now between pastors, and you have a choice. You can begin something you've already imagined and thought through and maybe even done before. You can begin an old beginning. Or, maybe, you can imagine something new. You can strive for something fundamentally different. You can make a genuinely New Beginning. The choice is yours.

Whatever you do, I want to echo the words of both the Angel and Jesus. "Do not be afraid." Do not be afraid.

One of the joys of Easter is, we don't have to keep living in the same old way. We can change. We can start over. We can have a genuinely new beginning.

In Jesus, we are all fundamentally changed. In Jesus, we are all genuinely new. In Jesus, we can all begin again. Our relationships, how we treat others, what matters most in life. All of it. In Jesus, we can have truly new beginnings.

Friend, do you need to start over? Is there some part of your life that needs a new beginning? Do you need a New Beginning, not an Old Beginning?

Believe this, because it's true. In Jesus, we can. In Jesus, we can. In Jesus, we can have a genuinely New Beginning.

This is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen.