

Sermon #35
Matthew 28:1-10
4,12,20 Easter Sunday

The New Normal

Happy Easter to all of you! And shall we say, happy Easter on this new normal. For certain, you and I, have never experienced an Easter like this one. Ever since COVID – 19 reared its ugly head in our world back in December, nothing has been quite the same since and we now have a new normal. Even after we get back together again, and we will, life will still be different. We will look back on this time and we will notice how we have been changed.

Yes, life has been changed, this Easter has been changed. Our hearts certainly go out to those who are suffering and to those who have lost loved ones. Our prayers and our support are with those who are taking care of many sick patients today. We also care for families and our children who are staying together now at home and that can bring on some difficult moments. We certainly think of those who have lost jobs and now find themselves in the unemployment lines.

Yes, this is certainly an Easter of a new norm. To help us cope with the fears and worries of this time, some cartoonists and humorists are helping us on the lighter side. A week ago I reposted a meme of a wedding where the pastor in robe was speaking to two monitors in front of him with the groom in one screen and the bride in the other. The pastor says, “I now pronounce you man and wife. You may press enter.” That would certainly satisfy the six-foot distance rule, but for virtual weddings like that, how do they do the kiss? You can’t kiss a computer screen. That certainly wouldn’t be healthy nor enjoyable.

Hallmark greeting cards are also being changed to say things like, “Roses are red, and violets are blue. I love you more each day from six feet away.” Yes, a little bit of humor helps in the new normal. But I like even more the virtual videos in sync where musicians play music, sing, dance. There are all different types of videos out there where people in various videos are doing something inspirational, humorous, or informational. It all helps us in our “new normal.” Which we hope doesn’t last too long.

More than two thousand years ago, Jewish disciples of Jesus Christ, found themselves in a “new normal.” Their teacher, leader, and friend had been crucified on a cruel Roman cross just three days earlier. All their hopes and dreams died with his vicious death. Fear and isolation were part of their new normal, just as we are experiencing today. So, we are in good company with this small band of men and women. Yes, they were also in isolation on that first Easter morning, just as we are today, but not for the same reason. They were afraid of the Roman soldiers and Jewish religious authorities. So, we do have something in common with them on this Easter morning.

1. Jesus has risen and his tomb is empty, the new normal.

On that first Easter morning, just as the sun begins to peak its rays over the horizon, we travel with two women from the group as they begin their journey. The two women are Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, most likely Mary the mother of James, as the gospel writers Mark and Luke both indicate. For certain the women were still filled with sorrow over the horrific crucifixion they had witnessed on Friday. Mark says that they worry about who will roll the stone away. Luke and Mark tell us that the women were taking spices to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body for proper burial. They had waited during the Sabbath, the day before. Now they came to finish this task.

Here in Matthew, what we have just read, the two women simply travel to see the tomb. When they arrive, a violent earthquake occurs. Matthew uses the word *seio*, meaning tremble or shake violently. It's where we get our word, seismic from. This was a seismic, cataclysmic event.

The cause of the violent earthquake was the coming of the angel of the Lord who came down from heaven, went to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat upon it – as in complete triumph. No stone could come close to matching the more powerful, heavenly being. A massive boulder becomes clay putty in the hands of a mighty angel, whose appearance was like lightening with clothes as white as snow.

Roman guards are also no match for this powerful being. They shake in fear and become like dead men. No earthly power can match this higher power. This angel has no concern whatsoever to talk with the guards. Rather, he speaks to the women, and only to them.

“Do not be afraid,” he says. From Jesus' birth narratives, on, heavenly beings have appeared to mere mortals, telling them not to be afraid. This is no different, yet the occasion is completely new. The angel assures the ladies. He knows they are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. But he is not here for his tomb is empty. “He has risen, just as he said. Come and see and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him’” (vv. 5-7).

In essence the angel is saying, “women, this is the new normal. Your friend's not here. Resurrected, living people don't stay in tombs.” This is the first indication that Jesus is alive. How do the women respond?

2. His disciples are not to be afraid.

The women hurry away from the tomb, “afraid yet filled with joy.” They run to tell his disciples. They came to the tomb walking, probably with heads down in sorrow and fear. But now after the earthquake, the shining angel with a startling message, they run and not simply walk. A mixture of fear, wonder, and joy fills their entire beings. All of a sudden, they see Jesus himself with the words, “Greetings.” Did Jesus forget

something in the tomb? No, probably not, he came back for the women. Just as in John's gospel, Jesus returns to see Mary, here he greets both women.

And their response? They come to him, bow before him clasping his feet and worship him. Clasping his feet shows that he was alive in body form. And they definitely recognize him. And most of all, they worship him. He is the risen Lord, worthy of worship. The women are not afraid of this new normal. Rather, they must embrace it.

Jesus now tells them the same message of the angel. Just in case they didn't get it before, now they certainly know for sure. "Do not be afraid," he reassures them again. That means that they probably were still afraid. Wouldn't you or I be the same?

Then Jesus continues with the same message, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." The women become the first eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and the first evangelists. Now they must tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection and the message to go to Galilee.

Before Jesus' death, just after instructing Peter that he would be crucified, he tells his disciples to go to Galilee (Matt. 26:32). Now, the same message. Something very important must be going to take place in Galilee. And the word "brothers" indicates their special Christian bond of fellowship.

Later, when the eleven arrive on the mountain in Galilee, he gives them the great commission. That means that there is work to do in this new normal. And you and I have work to do too, because we are still part of this new normal, even more than two thousand years later. We're still in the new normal. And what is our work?

3. They have work to do in this new normal.

There on the mountain, the risen Jesus commands his disciples with the work of the great commission.

- a.) They are to go and tell this good news about Jesus' resurrection.
- b.) And go and make – that is make new disciples of all nations in his power.

What does this new normal look like for you today? First, on this Easter Sunday morning, do you know the risen Lord and Savior. Has he made a difference in your life and given you new life in him? You can do so, by repenting of your sins and asking him to forgive you. Let Jesus' powerful love transform your life today.

And yes, during this time we have much less opportunity for social interaction. But what can you do to tell others and make more disciples of Jesus today? Yes, it can be through phone calls, cards, letters, email messages, or a taking a walk in the park at six feet apart. Let's not keep this message to ourselves. The Easter message is to be received and lived out – given out to make new disciples. That's the new norm.

And by the way, what will happen when things get back to somewhat of a normalcy? Whatever that is anyways. A friend of mine reposted this on her Facebook page, and I thought it worthwhile noting here, as we try to make a new norm out of our future. Listen...

For weeks I have heard people saying, "I just can't wait for things to be back to normal." I remember even saying that a few times myself. But as I've thought about our current situation, I have realized how much I don't want things to go back to the way they were. Here are a few of my thoughts...

1. I pray that the next time a friend grabs me and pulls me in for a hug, I actually take the time to appreciate the gift of their embrace.
2. I pray that when school resumes and I'm dropping my kids off, I take the time to thank the staff for the amazing gift that they give to our family.
3. I pray that the next time I'm sitting in a crowded restaurant I take the time to look around at the smiling faces, loud voices and thank God for the gift of community.
4. I pray that the next time I'm standing in church listening to the voices of praise that I take a moment to thank God for the gift of congregation.
5. I pray that the next time I see a person or situation that needs prayer, I hope I pray as passionately and fervently as I have these past few weeks.
6. I pray that when I am at the grocery store that I take a moment to thank God that He provides us with the necessities of life and the amazing people who work so hard to keep us supplied.
7. I pray that I never again take for granted the ability to hop in the car and visit a friend, go to the mall or to the park.

So, truth is, I don't want things to return to the way they once were. I pray that we take the lessons and challenges of the past few weeks and create a new normal. My goal is to pray more, love harder, and truly appreciate the daily abundance of blessings that were so easily overlooked just a mere few weeks ago. Amen, well said.

Conclusion

So, the new normal has come and is still coming. How will you respond? Most importantly our Savior is alive. The tomb is empty. It's time to go and tell and go and make – new disciples.

Prayer (Also pray for forgiveness of our sins – the new normal is his body broken for us and his blood shed for us.)

Break the bread

Lift up the cup

Partake together