

“Back to the Future”

Mark 16:1-8

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Easter

“My name is Friday and I carry a badge.” This was the introductory narration of every television episode of *Dragnet*. This show ran from 1951 until 1959 on the NBC network. It actually began on the radio in 1949 before transitioning to television.

Jack Webb, who played Sergeant Joe Friday in the series, helped create and design the show. Webb had a tremendous respect for people in law enforcement and wanted to perform a service for police by showing them as low-key working class heroes. Each storyline was based upon a true story and introduced with the words, “The story you are about to see is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.” At the end of each show the results of the trial and severity of the punishment were announced.

Perhaps the most famous line to come from the show was, “Just the facts, Ma’am.” This was Friday’s way of curbing the rambling that many witnesses were prone to do.

Sergeant Joe Friday would have been proud of Mark. He certainly doesn’t ramble when he gives us his account of Jesus’ resurrection. He just gives us the facts. His account is by far the most concise of the four gospel writers, only eight verses. Matthew has twenty, Luke fifty-three and John fifty-six, spread out over two chapters.

One of the facts Mark gives us is significant, however, and can easily be overlooked. Understandably, more attention is given to the stone that was rolled away, the empty tomb or the messenger that speaks to the bewildered women that arrived to anoint the body of Jesus. Listen to what he said, though, especially the assignment he gave the women.

“Don’t be alarmed,” the messenger said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter, **‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you’**” Mark 16:6-7.

“He is going ahead of you into Galilee.” There it is; the part of the story in Mark’s narrative that is often overlooked upon which we must shine the light today. Surely there is more here than instructions and directions, and there is.

Galilee was where it all began, the dream and partnership with Jesus. Galilee was the place where Jesus called the disciples to follow him. Nazareth was the place that Jesus preached his first sermon. Capernaum was the village where he performed his first miracle. Around the Sea of Galilee he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, shared many thought-provoking parables and fed the multitudes. It was on the sea that he stilled the storm and saved the disciples’ lives.

Galilee held a special place in their hearts. Those were good days filled with happy times and fond memories. And now, the disciples were told to return there. I wonder why.

Wasn’t this God’s way of telling the disciples that it was time to start again? It wasn’t time to think about quitting ministry and going back to their previous work. It wasn’t time to languish in guilt over abandoning Jesus in his hour of greatest need. It wasn’t time to blame each other for mistakes and unravel in anger. Instead, it was time to go back to Galilee and start again.

Was there ever a group that needed to hear this message of hope more than these confused, depressed, defeated and guilt-ridden disciples? Over the last three years, especially the final few days, they made so many mistakes. In retrospect, they realized that they were not good listeners and failed to learn what he tried to teach them. They imposed their expectations upon him, hoping to force him to be what they wanted. In many ways, they failed miserably. So, what was left for them? Not much, I’m sure they were thinking, if anything.

“He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you.”

Without a doubt, these words were far more than directions or instructions. They were words of encouragement and hope. They carried a strong message about their future, and what was that message?

It was time to regroup and start over. Galilee was the place where Jesus called them to follow him and it would be the place he would call them again. It would be the place that Jesus would resurrect their self-esteem and dreams. It would be the place that he would model compassion and grace, showing them the power of redeeming love. They needed to go back to the beginning in order to build a new future.

This is the message of Easter, isn't it? Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone. It is about confronting guilt and shame with the good news of forgiveness and reconstruction. It is about healing wounds and restoring relationships. It is about learning from mistakes and becoming wiser. It is about recognizing what is important and rearranging values and priorities. It is about admitting weaknesses and turning them into strengths. It is about dreaming new dreams so you can write more chapters to your story. It is about daybreak when you thought the night would never end. Easter is about starting over and who among us does not need to experience this?

Perhaps you are in a relationship that has imploded. Mistakes have been made. Hateful and hurtful words have been exchanged. The demise of the relationship appears inevitable.

Have you thought about going back to Galilee? Could you go to the place where the dream was birthed and the partnership began and start over? Can you go there much wiser now, realizing that the secret to marriage, parenting or friendships is not finding a perfect mate, child or friend, but not giving up on an imperfect one?

I think you can, at least Easter seems to indicate this. Easter sends a clear message that starting over is always possible in grace-filled relationships. Husbands and wives can rebuild their relationships and homes. Parents and children at odds with another can begin again. Underachieving students can go back to school. Disappointing careers can be reborn.

How? Go back to Galilee where the hopes, dreams and relationships were formed. Take Jesus with you and ask him to give you a new vision. Ask him to do for you and your loved ones what he did for the disciples when he resurrected their self-esteem and gave them the confidence to dream new dreams.

In addition, ask him to help you be the presence of Christ so you can assist others in healing painful wounds so they can reconstruct their lives. Ask him for wisdom, grace, patience and perseverance. I assure you he will help you just as he did his disciples.