

## “Beginning Again”

### John 20:1-18

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
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#### Easter

On January 3, 2006, Bob Woodruff became the co-anchor of ABC’s World News Tonight, replacing Peter Jennings. Three weeks later, he almost lost his life in Iraq.

He and his camera man, Doug Vogt, were riding in a tank twelve miles north of Baghdad when a roadside bomb exploded. Vogt’s shoulder was broken but Woodruff’s injuries were much more serious. He sustained major damage to his head, including his brain. A portion of his skull was removed to reduce the damage from swelling.

It was thirteen long, grueling months before Woodruff was back on the air. On February 27, 2007, he appeared on *Good Morning America*, *Oprah Winfrey* and *World News Tonight* to talk about his upcoming documentary, “To Iraq and Back: Bob Woodruff Reports.”

Woodruff and his wife, Lee, have written a book about their life after the accident, *In an Instant: A Family’s Journey of Love and Healing*. They share details of the struggles that they and their four children endured during Bob’s recovery.

Of particular interest to me is a quote from Dr. Mary Hibbard, a neuropsychologist at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York. Speaking to Bob’s wife, Lee, when they first met at the rehab outpatient hospital, Dr. Hibbard said, “Say goodbye to the old Bob. Meet the new Bob.”

I find this interesting because it captures the spirit of my Easter message today. Life is filled with endings and beginnings and both present us with some intriguing challenges. Let me share what I mean.

**Life is filled with endings.** Jesus died and was buried. More than his lifeless body, however, was placed in that tomb. He was wrapped in a shroud of the disciples’ hopes and dreams. I’m confident that they felt that this powerful movement died along with Jesus and life as they had known it for three years would become a fond memory.

Without a doubt, it was the saddest and most bewildering time in their lives. No light was piercing the darkness. Spiritually speaking, it was midnight and morning would never come.

Have you ever felt this level of despair? Who or what did you lose that led to anxiety and despondency? Was it a job, a marriage, a friendship or your health? Did your mate die or a child leave home in rebellion? Did a friend betray you?

What attacked your dreams with a lethal blow? Whatever it was, it doesn’t have to have the final word in your life because **faith is filled with the promise of new beginnings.**

To the women’s surprise, the tomb was empty when they arrived early that morning. They had no idea why it was empty, but would soon discover the reason, and it would be good. Jesus was alive and would write more chapters to his story. So would they. Their lives would be filled with new hopes and dreams as they would chart new courses.

Normally, we don’t like the word empty. We cringe at the thought of an empty stomach, an empty gas tank, an empty purse or billfold and an empty cupboard.

We view an empty tomb quite differently, though, especially when it belongs to Jesus. His empty tomb tells us that the endings in our lives will not have the final word. There will be more and our faith tells us through this story that it will be good.

I must be candid with you, though. **Walking down new roads and adding more chapters to your story will require courage and faith.** Like Mary, you will have to confront your confusion and fears. You will have to think differently and open your eyes to new possibilities. You will have to overcome the desire to recapture the past because resurrection always takes new forms.

Why didn’t Mary recognize Jesus instead of thinking he was the gardener? Was it dark? Was she crying? Was this idea just too bizarre? Did he look different? I don’t know the reason, but I know this.

Resurrections take new forms and lead us in new directions and we'll need a faith stronger than our fears to make this journey. Mary did and so will we.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann believes that the most distinguishing characteristic of God is His ability to make something new. According to him, the entire Bible bears witness to this gift of newness from our God and His son, Jesus. "The forming of the worlds, the liberation of Israel, the anointing of David, the deliverance of the exiles, the summons to disciples, the silencing of the storm, the call to Lazarus, all attest to God's ability to give newness to a world filled with endings."

For this reason, in ancient Israel, grief was always linked to hope. Believers never had to settle for things as they were and give in to despair like those that believed nothing happened apart from them and no one was at work but them. As people of faith, they never came to the end of the road. Always and at all times, there was more, even when it seemed improbable or impossible.

I believe this is the message of Easter, too, and I cannot think of one we need more. Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone because, as Christians, grief is always linked to hope just as it was for our ancient ancestors. We, too, believe in a God that makes all things new.

Perhaps you feel like you have reached a dead end this morning. You are getting a divorce or your beloved mate of many years died. You have lost your job or don't know which way to turn. You are facing limitations because of health issues. Your best friend moved away or has abandoned you. Your children are no longer at home and have left you with the empty nest. You recently buried a dream.

What do you do? Talk to God about it. Lay your life and need before Him. Ask Him to help you create something new in your life even as you share your fears, anxiety, doubts and confusion. Let Him know you trust Him but you will need a lot of help to remain confident and faithful to see new possibilities and travel down unfamiliar roads. I am certain He will help you and we have an empty tomb to remind us.