

It was springtime, about 35 years ago, when a first grade teacher assigned her class a project. She handed out plastic eggs and asked the children to bring them back filled with something symbolizing a new beginning. The children brought the eggs back and proudly set them on the teacher's desk. One by one, the teacher opened them.

She opened Laura's and found a flower. "Great job, Laura", she said, "A seed turns into a flower. This is symbolic of a new beginning." Then she opened Adam's. Inside was a butterfly. "Nice work", the teacher said, "Yes, Adam, a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. This shows a new beginning." Then she got to Ellen's. When she opened it, there was nothing inside. Afraid that Ellen had misunderstood the assignment, she picked up the next egg, but Ellen interrupted her. "Mrs. Whitley, aren't you going to talk about mine?" "But Ellen, there's nothing inside. Your assignment was to bring the egg filled with something that symbolizes new life." "Mrs. Whitley, I did. The empty egg is symbolic of the empty tomb. The people thought it was the end, but Jesus showed them a new beginning."

It was the teacher who that learned something that day. She now saw something she hadn't expected. In a similar manner, those who would teach us about the Resurrection, the women who went to the tomb, learned something unexpected that Easter morning almost 2,000 years ago.

Mary Magdalene and Mary (Jesus' mother) went to the tomb with the belief that Jesus was dead. They arrived and the ground rumbled and shook--and an angel appeared. The Roman guards panicked and were paralyzed with fear. And then the angel speaks to the women, saying, "Do not be afraid."

Mary, Jesus' mother may have been having a déjà vu. Those are the exact same words and angel had said to her when she got the news that she would have a baby. "Do not be afraid", there's more going on here than meets the eye. **Do not be afraid, God has got this!**

We're told that the women hurry away, "afraid, but filled with joy". In other words, they're a bit freaked out, but they're hopeful. *It's interesting to note that though they had gone looking for Jesus, it is Jesus himself who came to them.* When they least expected it-Jesus was there! And it wasn't an ending, but instead a beginning. This is good news for us, too.

He comes to each of us, time and again, when we least expect it. When we can't even imagine it. When we're feeling crushed by an ending. Whether it's the weight of loss because a friend has moved away, or you downsized your home, or you got a pink slip in a corporate consolidation--or any number of other endings that life brings; Jesus comes to us in that time and says 'don't be afraid', this is a new beginning. When faith is involved, God is involved. And when God is involved, there is more going on than meets the eye.

"Do not be afraid". That was the phrase the angels said to the shepherds when Jesus was born into this world. And we hear them again after Jesus has left this world. **These, friends, are words for living by. These are words to carry us \*into life\*, \*through life\*, and \*into eternal life\*.**

Fear is confining. Faith is defining. Let me say that again in another way: fear boxes us in—limiting us by the perception of keeping us "safe and secure" in our comfort zones—fear has a way of acting like an invisible fence—keeping us in a certain enclosure—by the way, the tomb was an enclosure. But Jesus came out of the tomb. And we can, too. Faith lets us step outside of our comfort zones to widen our experience of what is possible with God. *Faith helps us to become more than we are now.*

We often think of the definition of 'afraid' as "feeling fear or anxiety", but it also means being reluctant, unwilling, or hesitant about (something). Humans tend to be creatures of habit. We like things the way they've been, even if the way they've been hasn't been great... But God says, don't be afraid to break out of that box. You may not know what new beginning God has in store for you. We stay in the box--confined--OR--we can roll away the stone that holds us there and step forward in faith to new beginning with God.

The good news of the Resurrection is not just that Jesus lives, but because of that, each of us can live, really live, here and now-- and into eternity, as well. With faith--without fear. And we can do this because of Jesus.

Jesus came into this world to show us how to live. He asked us to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Even in those simple acts, he asked us to move forward in faith. The Resurrection is no less an opportunity for us to stretch and grow. Jesus asks us to put aside limiting beliefs and endings and to consider new beginnings. He asks us step beyond the familiar and to move forward in faith.

What might that look like for you?

He lives and because he lives, so may we! Blessed be and amen.