

“The Choice”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

But the women didn't know that yet. They were grief-stricken.
No one had loved Jesus more than his mother and Mary Magdalene and Salome.
Until God had brought Jesus into their lives, they had just been ordinary women with ordinary lives.
but then they had gotten caught up in this exciting adventure
following this charismatic man who lived like no one else they had ever known.
He had this deep understanding of God, and a faith that was unlike anything else they had ever seen
He taught people how to live simply, but with an inner power.
He worked miracles, turning water into wine, feeding thousands with a few morsels
walking on water, stilling storms.
He healed the sick. He had even raised the dead!
He lived as if he were bound to no one except God, breaking religious rules,
eating with sinners, touching lepers, treating them—women—as if they were totally equal to men.
People loved him – well, some people did. And people hated him, too, and....
and the whole exciting adventure had come to this awful, horrible, unimaginable end,
with his arrest and trial and crucifixion.
The man they had come to love, the man that had shown them this new way to live, was dead,
and all they could do was go to his tomb to finish preparing his body for burial.

The women were at the absolute lowest point in their lives.
All their dreams had died with Jesus
and all their hopes were buried and sealed up in that tomb with him forever.

They go to the story to perform this last act of love for him – to prepare his body properly for burial,
now that the Sabbath was over,
but when they get there, the stone has been rolled away, the tomb is empty,
and a young man tells them that Jesus is not dead but has risen
and they are to go and tell the others and then go and meet Jesus!

And it's on that strange note that Mark's story ends, with the women amazed, stunned, dumbfounded.
Now in many bibles you will find 2-3 alternate endings,
but most scholars agree this is how Mark ends his gospel.
And I believe he ends up there for a reason—
because here is where every one of us stands at every moment of our lives.

The fact is that we, like the women, have been told that Jesus is risen and has gone ahead and will meet us.

The women stood at the door of the empty tomb and were told the news.
How would they respond? What would they do?
They had a choice to make.
They could have chosen not to believe it and found an alternate explanation.
They could have believed it intellectually
but gone back home and resumed their ordinary lives as if nothing were different.
They could have believed it and gone back home
but decided to meet back at the tomb every week to remember what Jesus had said and done.
OR, they could have done what the young man had told them to do –
they could have gone to tell the others, and gone to meet Jesus.

I believe Mark ended his gospel there because that is exactly the place
where every one of us human beings stands at every moment of our lives.
We stand at the door of the empty tomb, and we've been told that Jesus lives and we should go and meet him.

Some people simply don't believe that it happened.
Others believe that it happened but it doesn't affect their lives at all.
Others come to the tomb every week to hear about what Jesus said and did,
and may try to do some of the things Jesus said were good.
But none of those responses follow the instructions.
The instructions are to go and tell others the amazing news that Jesus is alive! and to go and meet Jesus!
Each moment of our lives we have a choice to go home, to stay at the tomb, or to go and meet Jesus.

So what does it mean to meet Jesus? It means you see him, or you hear his voice, or you feel his presence.
And what does it mean to see Jesus or hear his voice or feel his presence? There are all kinds of ways.
Maybe Jesus communicates with you by a voice in your head.
Maybe it's through a word of scripture that jumps out at you.
Maybe it's through a dream or vision.
Maybe it's through an angel or another human being.
Maybe it's through a coincidence or God sighting or Godwink.
Maybe it's through an answer to prayer or a sign you've asked for.
Maybe it's through a physical sensation of warmth or tingling or chills.
When we go to meet Jesus and open our eyes and ears and minds and hearts and spirits to him, Jesus promises to be there.
We just need to learn to recognize him.

And how will we know if we've met Jesus?
We'll know because our hearts will be changed.
We'll know because this story that we've been told will no longer be just a story
about a man who lived and died and whose body disappeared from a tomb.
It will not be a story about a man who lived in the past to secure our place with God in the future.
It will not be a story we believe with our minds, but a relationship that means more to us than any other.
It will not be a story we can keep to ourselves,
it will be the kind of passionate love relationship that we can't stop talking about.

I imagine that every single one of you worshipping in here or out there
has had some kind of experience of God in your life, but here's the thing:
if your heart is not burning within you,
if you are not running to meet a Jesus,
if you are not bursting to share the news about what God is doing in your life,
then let me assure you there is SO MUCH more in store for you!!!

The God who raised Jesus from the dead has the power to do ANYTHING!
And Jesus who trusted God enough to give up everything to suffer and die as an example for us
has the love to do ANYTHING!
And the Spirit who can fill you to overflowing can empower you to do even greater things than Jesus!

The women who came to the tomb that first Easter morning were at the lowest point in their lives,
but they were invited to go share the news that Jesus was alive and to go and meet him.
At this moment you, too, may be facing challenges. Your life may not be going as you had planned.
And it might even seem as if your dreams have died and your hopes have been buried and sealed in a tomb.
But this is not the end of your story or mine.

This, like every other moment in our lives, is simply the point when we decide
if we're going to return to our former life, stay here at the tomb,
or go and meet Jesus and tell everyone we meet the news.

The choice that was before the women that first Easter morning is the same choice that is before each of us today.
I hope that you will choose to join me in going to meet Jesus and proclaiming to everyone along the way:
Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen