

## “Run To Your Life”

Ruth 1:11-18  
Mark 15:45-16:8

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Philip, born with Down's syndrome, attended a third-grade Sunday school class with several eight-year-old boys and girls. Typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip with his differences. But because of a creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of the group, though not fully. The Sunday after Easter the teacher brought Leggs pantyhose containers, the kind that looks like large eggs. Each receiving one, the children were told to go outside on that lovely spring day, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the egg-like container. Back in the classroom, they would share their new-life symbols, opening the containers one by one in surprise fashion. After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed the containers on the table. Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would ooh and ahh.

Then one was opened, revealing nothing inside. The children exclaimed, "That's stupid. That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment." Philip spoke up, "That's mine." "Philip, you don't ever do things right!" the student said. "There's nothing there!" I did so do it," Philip insisted. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb was empty!" Silence followed. From then on Philip became a full member of the class.

He died not long afterward from an infection most normal children would have shrugged off. At the funeral this class of eight-year-olds marched up to them Lord's Table not with flowers, but with their Sunday school teacher, each to lay on it an empty pantyhose egg.

The symbol of new life and the best news ever discovered is an empty tomb. What an odd way for God to deliver good news? God, you don't ever do things right! You didn't do the assignment right! There's nothing there! It certainly didn't appear to be good news when the women first discovered it. Mark reports that they were terrified.

What a difficult few days these women must have had. These women had followed Jesus everywhere. They were dedicated to him. He was their life, their whole reason for living. He was all they had.

The words we heard from Ruth could have easily been their words. Ruth had lost everything. Her husband had died. She had no children. All she had was her mother-in-law Naomi. Naomi was going to leave and go back to her country by herself. But Ruth clung to her, weeping, "Do not press me to leave you or turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die- there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

That's the kind of love these women had for Jesus. They would follow Jesus anywhere. They followed him all over Galilee and Judea. Even when the disciples deserted Jesus, they followed him to the cross and watched as the love of their lives died unjustly and excruciatingly. And when his body was carried to the tomb, they still followed.

Some of you may have watched the series finale of the long running TV drama ER. A dying woman was brought into the ER, her loving husband of 60 years by her side. A few months earlier, she had been told she would die soon. He knew this. She was breathing poorly. He asked, "Why is she breathing that way?" The doctors said, "She's dying." He knew this, but it just didn't seem possible. "I'm not ready for this." As he held her hand, she died. He asked if he could have some time alone with her. When they left, he crawled up on the hospital bed, kissed her as he had done for decades and lay close to her body. He didn't want to let go. Perhaps these women would have climbed right into that tomb with Jesus and curled up right beside him. But the tomb was closed.

They could not have been prepared for the shock they were in for. Yes, Jesus had told them all that he would be raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, but all they knew was what they had seen with their own eyes: Jesus died, he was dead, and he was placed in a tomb. All that was left was to apply spices and oils to the body as was the custom. Their biggest concern was how they would get that big stone moved out of the way. As it turned out, that would be the least of their worry.

The stone was rolled out of the way. The tomb was empty. Some guy in white was telling them something, but their ears were buzzing with shock. The tomb was empty. Was the body stolen? Imagine going to visit your beloved's grave and finding it open and empty. Their eyes as big as moons, their mouths agape. And who was this guy in white?? He's saying something, "He has been raised; -it's just like Jesus said!- he is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him.- yes, we saw him laid right there- Go, tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told him." And they ran off. We can't always explain why we run. When we are not sure what is going on. When we are in chaos. We run. They ran.

But I imagine at some point, they ceased running from the empty tomb and they began running to their Lord, their beloved, Jesus. He was out there ahead of them somewhere. Alive!! The terror turned to joy and they were children running. Instead of running for their lives, they were running TO their LIFE! Their Savior, their Beloved!!

It's started with an empty tomb.

Let's think a moment about what that means. In his death, Jesus paid the penalty for all sin and thereby broke its power over us. Along with his body, our sin was buried in that tomb. This was illustrated aptly in the typically crude cartoon (for immature adult audience only), South Park. (Someone is thinking to themselves, "This guy's going straight to you know where for using a South Park illustration).

The plot is set in our modern day financial calamity. People are in debt up to their eyeballs. And so the response of the whole town is to not spend any more money. They stop driving cars and revert to riding camels. They stop buying clothes and wear bed sheets instead. But one boy decides he will apply for an American Express no-limit Platinum Card. Because credit card companies will give credit to practically anyone, he receives it. He sets up a table with a credit card vendor machine and begins to take on everyone's debt. Eventually, the whole town is debt free, except for this one sacrificial boy. The problem is that everyone just goes back to their old lives of running up their credit cards.

We cling to that old life, even though we are weighted down with so much debt, so much guilt. We don't want to let it go. And the result is that we become frozen. Rather than giving ourselves freely, we hold back. We ride camels of callousness and wear bed sheets of bad will. We fear that everyone we meet wants to take something from us. We are living in a tomb. Not really living at all.

By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the debt that all of humanity owed and what is left is an empty tomb. A fresh start. Rather than being mired down in our debts that we will never pay off, we are free to make new choices.

At 5 a.m. on any given day, Anne Mahlum could be found running in the dark streets of Philadelphia -- with homeless men cheering her on as she passed their shelter. But one morning in spring of 2007, she stopped in her tracks. Why am I running past these guys?" recalls Mahlum, 27. "I'm moving my life forward every day -- and these guys are standing in the same spot." Instead of continuing to pass them by, the veteran marathoner sprang into action so they could join her. She contacted the shelter, got donations of running gear, and in July 2007 the "Back On My Feet" running club hit the streets. The first day, Mahlum led nine shelter residents in a mile-long run. Today, Back on My Feet has teams in three Philadelphia shelters, including 54 homeless members and more than 250 volunteers. You can't tell the difference between the volunteers and the homeless. All you see is runners.

For years Ann had be running from her dad and his alcoholism. But one day she discovered an empty tomb. She realized that she no longer needed to be weighed down by her feelings about her dad. She began to run, not away from her dad, but to true life. Christ led her to these homeless men. And through her, these men found an empty tomb as well.

One of the runners is Mike. Mike was addicted to crack. It led him away from his job, his family, and his home...his life. He was in tomb of addiction. Jesus provided the empty tomb and led him to a new life. He now has a job, a home, and is beginning to rebuild his family.

Christ is calling each of us to come out of our tombs. The tombs that keep us from experiencing the fullness of living. And he makes us a promise: that when we die to this earthly life, we will not spend eternity in a tomb. Rather than running from our old

lives, we can run to the life God always intended for us. A life with the risen Christ leading the way. He promises us He will go where we go. He will stay where we stay. Our people shall be his people (even those people that are different and never seem to do anything right), and his God shall be our God. And because he was buried where we are buried, we will live and death shall never part us.