

And Peter Ran

Luke 24:1-12

The Reverend Jane Willan

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There is the story of an Illinois man who left Chicago for a vacation in Florida. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to meet him the next day. When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a short e-mail. He typed in her email address quickly and unfortunately, he missed one letter and his email went to another person. It landed in the inbox of an elderly preacher's wife, whose husband had passed away only the day before. When the grieving widow checked her e-mail, she took one look and fell in a faint to the floor. At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this email on the screen:

*Dearest Wife,
Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.
Your Loving Husband
P.S: Sure is hot down here.*

Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb....

Then the women returned from the tomb...

Peter got up and ran to the tomb. If I were Peter, I would have run away from Jesus.

Three nights before the empty tomb, Peter had denied Jesus. One of the most poignant moments in all of scripture. So that makes me ask, why did he run to Jesus? I would have heard that Jesus was risen and run away. Because we only run to those that we know love us.

Think of children. Think of the prodigal son. We only run to those we know love us.
And Peter ran. Are you running to Jesus?

The church that runs to Jesus is fearless. It doesn't worry about numbers—how many members, how much money, are we growing or declining, are we still the place to be or are people viewing us as prime real estate? A church that runs to Jesus leaps without hesitation into the fight for justice. A church that runs to Jesus, is unafraid of making decisions with its heart and not its head. Someone said it is a long journey from "I know it in my head and I know it in my heart." A church that runs to Jesus, knows in its heart.

A church that runs to Jesus is compassionate. It invites the homeless in, not spending time on keeping them out. It is an advocate for the marginalized, not from a distance. Not thru book studies and meetings, but loudly and adamantly and effectively. A compassionate church is aware of what's going on around it. A compassionate church opens its eyes to the world, it sees more clearly where compassion is needed. It is aware of things it would have otherwise chosen to ignore.

A church running to Jesus doesn't ever hear itself saying, "We've never done it that way before." A church that runs to Jesus is never caught up in process to the point change is frightening. When Peter ran to Jesus he didn't hesitate, he didn't think it over, he didn't weigh his options. He ran. He ran. Because he knew Jesus loved him. He had nothing but confidence in his heart. And when you have nothing but confidence in your heart, you can do anything. Are you running to Jesus?

Linda Down discovered real power and she needed it. She had dealt with the limitations of cerebral palsy all her life. One day, she got this crazy idea of running the New York Marathon. But Linda walked with difficulty, so running seemed out of the question? She used Canadian canes with arm clamps to steady her arms. On top of this she was 25 pounds overweight and jobless. In a state of depression, she began reading in the scriptures about the power of God at work in people's lives.

She read Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." While training, she listened for God. She thought as she was running in the dark at night: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction about things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). She thought about her limited dreams, her inability to see beyond the obstacles of life. Faith, she said to herself, was running in spite of the insurmountable obstacles.

As the NY Marathon began that cold morning, she wore gloves on her hands to soften the impact of the crutches. It was windy on the bridge and uphill. She had not expected the beginning to be so difficult. As she finished the mile-long bridge, there were no runners in sight ahead of her. Spectators were gone for the most part. But one little girl ran out into the street and cheered her on, "You can do it!" Others on the curb later applauded and cheered and shouted. They brought tears to Linda's eyes and helped her to keep going.

Ten hours later Linda was still running in the dark through dangerous neighborhoods. Some admiring spectators walked with her for safety. Then an ABC-TV camera crew showed up and followed the story of her courage. She continued to run. She wore a hole in one sneaker from dragging it across the ground; her hands ached and throbbed; her arms became black and blue and swollen; she couldn't speak to anyone because of fatigue, but she continued to run because she prayed: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...I can do all things."

Then two recreation trucks in Central Park came by and stayed with her to light the way. After 11 hours of struggle and over 27 miles, Linda crossed the finish line. People were crying -- even the TV crew was crying -- and Linda was crying at the response and support that she had received from God and these people. She thanked God for the power to do such a miraculous thing. Later she was invited to the White House and was pictured on the front page of the New York Times. Her story was not just a story of a noble effort; it was the story of the power of God at work.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And Peter ran. He ran to the one he knew loved him. Are you running? Are you running to Jesus?

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Rev. Jane apologizes, but she preaches from her notes, - so her sermons may not translate as well into a printed, document format. However, she loves to discuss her sermons, - so feel free to email her with any thoughts or questions!