

Begin with Jesus

Psalm 111⁷⁻¹⁰/ Luke 10³⁸⁻⁴²/

Begin Again With Jesus.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Our most basic task as Christians is to relate to Jesus and as we look to the year ahead of us we need again to decide what that will mean for each of us. The Church makes a couple of assumptions about this. The first is that for better or for worse this task is best done within a community of fellow travelers – of those who also want to relate to Christ. For all of its problems, its faults and its missteps the Church provides a place where God will meet us and speak to us. We cannot be, as it were, individual Christians. As much as faith is also personal it relies on the relationships forged within the very human thing we call Church. Quite simply faith is a corporate calling.

The other assumption the Church makes about relating to Christ is that such a relationship is a personal thing. That is, God relates to us and wants to relate to us as individuals and so we cannot replace God's specific and directive Word to us with

corporate existence. The Church cannot replace a life lived with Jesus and in His light. If our life is devoid of a sense of God's **specific** Word to us as individuals we are not living as Christ would have us live. So this morning I want to challenge you to think about how you will answer the knock at the door of your life this year.

One thing I can assure us of as we begin to answer this question together is this... God is a God of new beginnings. No matter what has happened before; no matter how last year has gone or, indeed, last week – you can be assured that God wants to begin again with you. For God anytime is a good time for a new beginning – God is willing and able to **begin again** with us whenever we are ready to begin with God.

In our reading this morning that was precisely what Mary was doing – she was beginning with God – she had chosen to begin with Jesus that evening and, as Jesus said in reply to her sister's grumblings – this was the **better thing** and it would not be taken from her.

There are perhaps many reasons why this is but one of the most obvious is that God's way is the best way and for we who tend to be so wayward the best way to discover that is to begin again with God. The question is, are we willing to acknowledge that this is the case – that God is the One who can make something good of our lives. So often we fail to acknowledge this...

Chuck Swindoll the American preacher arrived at a hospital one day to visit a father who had been in confinement for some

time because of an infectious disease. This man had a young son, and during his confinement in the hospital, he had made a little wooden truck for his boy. Since the boy was not allowed to go into the ward and visit his father, an orderly had brought the gift down to the child, who was waiting in front of the hospital with his mother. The father was looking out of a fifth-floor window, watching his son unwrap the gift.

The little boy opened the package, and his eyes got wide when he saw that wonderful little truck. He hugged it to his chest.

Meanwhile, the father was walking back and forth waving his arms behind the windowpane, trying to get his son's attention.

The little boy put the truck down and reached up and hugged the orderly and thanked him for the truck and all the while the frustrated father was going through these dramatic gestures, trying to say, "It's me, son. I made the truck for you. I gave that to you. Look up here!" I could almost read his lips.

Finally the mother and the orderly turned the boy's attention up to that fifth-floor window. It was then the boy cried, "Daddy! Oh, thank you! I miss you, Daddy! Come home, Daddy. Thank you for my truck." And the father stood in the window with tears pouring down his cheeks. How much like that child we are. We receive so much from God and we fail to recognise who the Giver is.

God has a better thing for each one of us this year. God has a better way; a better path; a better future for each one of us this year **if we are willing to choose it**. The question is – where does this **better path** begin!? How shall we know what that path is amongst the myriad of directions and opportunities and pathways before us?

The first thing we must remember is that beginning with God is a matter not of our worthiness but of our willingness.

[Repeat] Never doubt God's willingness and ability to begin again with you. Yes, there might be some requirements, some boundaries, some instructions which will all be for our own good – but God is always a willing partner in beginning anew with us. Are you doubting today whether God could begin again with you after what you've done; after what you've said; after how you've avoided God for years? Don't! God is more than delighted to welcome the prodigal back into His arms. God comes for the sick, the defeated, the doubting, the derelict and the downcast. You are never less than completely welcome back in the company of God. If you will begin again – God will be ready for you.

Are you imagining after all your beginnings and your failings that God will be wary of your infidelities, your backsliding, your broken promises and your shame? Then don't be because Christ understands our weaknesses and our waywardness. He was like us. He experienced the same limitations and loss. He knows we are fragile and unreliable and still, He longs to begin again with us. God is the God of new beginnings **from eternity and to eternity.**

Then how might we begin again with God this year? Where do we start? Do we start with resolutions, with promises to God, with a determination to be more pious, more committed, more Christlike even? Will this make a new beginning with God?

Do we analyse our mistakes, try to understand our weakness, begin a new diet? Do we make a resolution to do and to be something different – to choose different things, to act differently? You know I have no doubt some of these things might be useful, even healthy but they don't constitute a new beginning with God. Rather our beginning with God follows a very simple but scriptural dynamic which we find in the picture in revelation today of Jesus standing at the door of our lives and it is this... **receive and believe. [Repeat]** The long and short of it is that the one thing we can do when God knocks at the door of our lives is to open to door. Indeed, this is the one thing that is needed because nothing can replace the presence of Christ in our lives. We might want and hope to be good for Christ; we might run around and tidy up the place thinking that will at least make us look good; we might even make a significant sacrifice to God – a gift of some value in order to be or to feel worthy but that is not what God is after. As C. S. Lewis so rightly said... **“The Christian does not think that God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because he loves us.”**

God is not looking for 'good' people but for people who want God in their lives and the key is **to receive and believe**. Now some may want to reverse that order but I suspect it is fine the way it is and I will explain why shortly. The key, however, to all relationship with God is to receive Christ – **to open our lives to Him and to invite Him into every aspect of that life.**

This is what Mary had done. Indeed, Mary and Martha had both opened their lives to Jesus but Mary continued to so by

choosing to sit at His feet as he taught. She continued to receive Jesus and to open her life to Him. And when we open the door of our lives to Christ we are **receiving Him** and allowing Him to come in and to deal with the mess He finds there. Make no mistake – this act of receiving Jesus is **the primary skill of the Christian faith**. As we open the door of our lives to Him so we allow the Spirit the room to change what is within and to grow the plant of faith there. And this applies whether we've been a Christian for a day or a century. The primary act of faith is to open the door of our lives to Jesus Christ.

So, what does it mean to **receive Jesus**? Certainly, one place to start with this question is that to receive Jesus is to receive Him **as He gave Himself to us!** When someone knocks at your door they are giving themselves to us in a certain way. They've chosen not to email or txt us or to ring us on the phone. They don't want to give themselves to us using that form of communication. Rather, by knocking on the door they want to give themselves to us 'in person' as it were – by speaking to us directly and by appearing before us in person.

Jesus gives himself to us not in any of these ways but through the scriptures which say one thing very clearly about Him – that He is God and that is how He comes to us. When Jesus gives Himself to us He gives himself to us as God and as the Lord of all life and whether or not we're inclined to believe this doesn't matter. This is how he is!

We dare not try to receive him as anything else because he is not anything else. Christ is the Lord of life and He's knocking at

my door and at yours. We open that door by speaking to God and by saying to God – come in – make yourself a home in my life such as it is. We open that door by making a decision to admit our need of God in our life and by then allowing God to address us. And we open the door of our life by admitting our defeats to God.

And then a miracle happens. As we receive Jesus He is able to impart to us the very thing which we need; the hope, the joy, the belief, the desire – to live in this relationship. When we receive Jesus He is able to change us. As our reading from John says... “¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God —” Now this word right is somewhat of a poor translation because the actual word used is the word ‘power’ such that those who receive Jesus receive **the ability to become God’s children**. We are **enabled** by the Presence of Christ and this extends to belief.

I believe there is a reason the word receive comes before belief and it is simply this – belief is a mark of our belonging to God – it is a fruit of that relationship and not something we can just conjure up.

However, when we simply open the door to Christ, when we receive him and allow him into our lives **then** he enables belief. This, I suggest, is why believe comes after receive here. It is receiving Christ that enables believing in Him. Yoda from Star Wars once said these famous words... [Video]

There is no 'try' in faith but it's not a matter of 'do' either.
Rather there is only Christ in our life and as we open the door to
Him – faith comes to life within us.