

**PRAY** Jesus, you walked the roads of Galilee healing and freeing people. We walk in your footsteps in our world. We find you with us in our relationships. May we be friends who heal and free one another. Amen.



# SPIRIT



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By Julie Surma

**WHEN YOU ARE 16 AND PREGNANT** every decision bears lifelong consequences. There is even a TV show about it now. This is the story of how one girl chooses, and why.

The summer before junior year Megan kept busy horseback riding, going to cheerleading practice, and seeing Dan, her boyfriend of almost two years. When school started, she realized she'd been feeling tired for a while. When the feeling didn't go away, her best friend Lauren urged her to take a pregnancy test.

"I bought a test, went home, took it, and it was positive," Megan recalls. "I freaked out. No one was home, so I just sat and cried. I texted Dan right away to tell him. I texted Lauren and told her."

Megan's dad had died of cancer when she was 13. She told her mom the news by writing what turned out to be a six-page letter.

"I went to school, hoping maybe Mom would have time to calm down,"



Megan says. "But she opened the letter right away. So at school, at ten in the morning, I was told that I needed to go home immediately."

"I think every kid in this situation assumes that her parents won't support her," Megan continues. "Until you are in the situation, you never really know how your parents are going to react."

"I walked into the house and my mom laid into me," Megan says. "She started crying, and I started crying. Then she said, 'We'll discuss this when you get home,' and sent me back to school."

## DECISIONS

First Megan and her mom discussed the options. Then together they talked with Dan's family. Both families gathered and Megan and Dan's parents laid out the choices—Megan and Dan could give the baby up for adoption, or they could keep the baby. Either way, the three parents let Megan and Dan know what they would do to help.

"Dan and I talked about it for about six weeks, on and off," Megan says. "We talked about how we would make it financially if we kept the baby. We asked each other all the questions. How would we go to school? Where would we live? How would we make money? Because we were in high school, we talked about what programs might be out there to help us."

16 AND  
PREGNANT



“What bothers me with a lot of people my age is that they don’t really consider the whole situation,” Megan says. “They tend to think, ‘This baby is mine, so I have to keep it.’ But they don’t consider how the child is going to be brought up or what they are going to have to do to raise the child.

“I think they think it’s going to be like getting a puppy—‘Oh, I just have to feed it and give it water, let it outside, and take it to the vet every once in awhile.’ They don’t realize how much you have to grow up and how much you have to be responsible for.

“I thought about the choices Dan and I had already made: we chose to have sex; we chose to carry this child. Now it was our job to choose for this child, to choose what kind of life the child would have.

“We knew that we were fairly capable people, and could keep the baby. We knew we were smart kids and had the support of our families. But we knew that we wanted our child to have more than we could give him at our age. It wasn’t that we didn’t love our baby; it was that we did what was best for him.”

In the end, Megan and Dan chose adoption.

## ADOPTION PROCESS

Dan and Megan met with adoption agencies until they found a social worker they felt comfortable working

with. They described to the social worker what they wanted in an adoptive family.

“We looked for a family we had things in common with but who were capable of giving him more than we could,” Megan says. “We looked for people who were outdoorsy, from a small town, who were nice, who had animals, and who were financially stable.”

The social worker came up with the profiles of the families that matched what they wanted. Megan and Dan made yes and no piles. From the yes group they picked three couples to meet.

“The first couple we met turned out to be the couple we picked,” Megan explains.

“Everything just felt right. They hugged us both right away, and we sat and talked as if we had known them forever.”

## SCHOOL AND FRIENDS

“I’m glad I kept going to school,” Megan says. “I needed the distraction. I’m the type of person who needs to be doing something, so sitting at home would have driven me nuts. And I think I would have fallen behind academically. This way, I still made the honor roll every quarter.”

“I’ve got a pretty tight knit group of friends,” Megan continues. “They didn’t judge me, because they knew me. But it was hard with all of the people who didn’t really know me, because they made comments or gave me dirty looks as I walked by.

“My core group stuck with me though. Lauren was always there. Dan was always there. A couple of his friends were there for him. The people who were supposed to be there were there.”

## BIRTH

When it came time for the baby to be born, Megan didn’t want the

awkwardness of being in school when her water broke. So she decided her labor should be induced.

She got to the hospital at seven in the morning. “About three I decided to get an epidural,” Megan says. “About six thirty I was ready to be done! Then at 7:19 our baby boy was born.”

Megan and Dan and the adoptive parents, Grace and Jacob, stayed in the hospital. Grace and Jacob let them see the baby whenever they wanted. Usually, Megan and Dan had the baby during the day, and Grace and Jacob stayed with him at night.

On the third day, everyone got ready to go home. They all walked out together, checked the car seat to make sure it was okay, took a couple of pictures, and said goodbye. “We’ll call you when we get home!” Grace and Jacob said.

“That’s when I cried,” Megan says. “It was probably the hardest part of the whole thing—watching that car drive away. Once we decided to give the baby up for adoption, I thought of my pregnancy as carrying someone else’s child, so I wouldn’t get as attached. But seeing that car drive away broke me. It was bad.”

“I didn’t cry all the way home, but almost,” Megan continues. “Dan sat in the back seat with me and we held each other and talked. When we got home Grace and Jacob called about twenty minutes later and said, ‘Don’t worry. We’ll send pictures. Anything you need, just let us know.’”

## LIFE NOW

Megan and Dan chose open adoption. They see their son, Nick, six to eight times a year. Both families exchange birthday cards and gifts. “It’s kind of like a niece/nephew situation,” Megan says. “They are all just like family.”

“So Nick will know he’s adopted. And as he gets older, his parents will continue to explain



# SUNDAY GOSPEL

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Jesus heals the sick.

**NARRATOR 1:** Upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever. The disciples told Jesus about her.

**NARRATOR 2:** Jesus went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up out of bed. The fever left her. She began to serve them.

**NARRATOR 1:** After sunset people brought Jesus all who were sick and

possessed by demons. Before long, the whole town was gathered outside the door of Simon's house.

**NARRATOR 2:** Jesus healed many people and drove out their demons. He would not permit the demons to speak because they knew who he was.

**NARRATOR 1:** Rising early the next morning, Jesus left Simon's house. He went to a lonely place in the desert and prayed.

**NARRATOR 2:** Simon and his friends

went out searching for him. When they found him, they said:

**DISCIPLES:** Everybody is looking for you!

**JESUS:** Let us move on to the neighboring villages so that I may proclaim the good news there also. That is what I have come to do.

**NARRATOR 1:** Jesus left and traveled throughout Galilee preaching the good news and expelling demons.

Mark 1.29-39

it. He'll know who we are and know that it wasn't that we gave him up because we didn't want him, but because we wanted him to have more.

"I am the kind of person who talks to God a lot," Megan says. "I don't necessarily read the bible or get to church as often as I should. But I talk to God. So that's basically what I did that whole time I was pregnant. If I was having a hard time in school, or if I was out of it, or needed something, or was angry and wanted to talk with somebody, I would start talking to God, and then just let it go."

"And I know God helped us," Megan continues, "because of the way everything turned out for the best. I

couldn't ask for it to be better. The parents we picked are awesome.

"There is no doubt that what we did was hard. But even if I had to go back and do it again, I'd do the exact same thing. Everything was all for Nick. There are days when I wish I would have kept him. There are days when I cry. But this is what was best and it all worked out in the end."

Megan and Dan went their separate ways at the end of their senior year. After graduation Megan moved to a bigger city where she is working and saving money to attend college next year.



## QUESTIONS

**1** What are Megan and Dan's values? **2** What peer pressure would you experience if you or your girlfriend were pregnant? How would you handle the pressure? **3** What, if anything, did Megan and Dan learn? **4** What do Jesus' actions reveal about what God wants for people? **5** If Jesus met Megan, what do you imagine he might say to her?

## Why does the Catholic Church teach that abortion is morally wrong? In Catholic teaching an embryo is a person from conception.

"Human life is sacred," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, "because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of Life from its beginning to its end; no one can under

any circumstances claim the right directly to destroy an innocent human being" (2259).

"Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life" (2270).

"Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being" (2274).



# Jesus' women disciples.

**P**eter's mother-in-law is Jesus' first woman disciple. She is one of many firsts in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, which previews Jesus' actions in the whole gospel. Jesus is a whirlwind of activity. He gets baptized, goes to the desert, begins to preach, heals people, casts out demons, prays, and calls disciples.

Jesus' first woman disciple meets him through her son-in-law Simon, one of Jesus' first four men disciples. After Jesus and his first men disciples worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath, Peter brings them home. They discover his wife's mother sick in bed with a fever. Her story is short, Mark 1.31.

Jesus goes to her, takes her hand, and raises her up. She responds. She chooses to begin serving the new community.

Two key words in her story tell us that Peter's mother-in-law becomes Jesus' disciple. *To raise up* is the first word. Mark uses the same word in Greek, *egeiren*, to describe Jesus raising up Peter's mother-in-law from fever and God raising up Jesus from the dead. The young man in Jesus' empty tomb says, "He has been raised up; he is not here," (Mark 16.6). Using the same word links this first miracle in Mark's gospel with the last and greatest miracle—Jesus' resurrection.



*Serve* is the second key word in Jesus' call of his first woman disciple. When Jesus raises her up, Peter's mother-in-law responds by beginning to serve his new community. Many versions of the New Testament translate her response as "she begins to wait on them." This translation of the Greek verb *diekonei* makes Peter's mother-in-law appear to be making brunch rather than choosing to be a disciple.

**J**esus defines what serving means when he says of himself, "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve—to give his life in ransom for many" (Mark 10.45). For Jesus, to serve is to give one's whole life as he does. Deacons get their name from the noun *diakonos*, which means *server* or *minister*.

When Peter's mother-in-law begins to serve Jesus and his new disciples, she is giving her whole life to a new community. She becomes the first of Jesus' women disciples.

Only near the end of Mark's gospel do readers find out that Jesus has many other women disciples. Mark 15.40-41 mentions by name three women disciples from Galilee—Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. They and many other women look on from a distance as Jesus dies on the cross.

Mark identifies these women as disciples by explaining they followed and served Jesus when



he was in Galilee and came with him to Jerusalem. They followed Jesus just as Peter, Andrew, James, and John did when they left their fishing nets. The word *follow* means *to attach one's self to a teacher, to commit one's self, to walk in someone footsteps*.

**O**nly Jesus' women disciples are at the cross in Mark's gospel. At Jesus' arrest, all the men disciples but Peter flee. Peter follows Jesus as far as the high priest's courtyard where he denies he knows his friend and teacher. The women witness the most important events in Jesus' life—his death, burial, and absence from the tomb. They stand with him in his suffering, even though they cannot stop it. These women model two essential qualities of all disciples—they attach themselves to Jesus and give their lives in serving his community.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Identify women and men in your parish who give you examples of contemporary ways to follow and serve Jesus as his disciples.
- 2 Read Mark 1.31 in several different translations. What translation best shows Peter's mother-in-law as Jesus' first woman disciple?
- 3 Find out in what ministries in your parish or area teens can serve.

**The holy women who came to finish anointing the body of Jesus were the first to encounter the risen one and thus the first messengers of Christ's resurrection.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #547*