

St. Mark Passion (Mark 14–15)
Holy Monday
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 25, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

During this Holy Week, or Passion Week, as it is sometimes called, we'll look at the passion narratives found in each of the four Gospels focusing on aspects of the story particular to each Gospel. Yesterday, on Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday, we heard from the Gospel of St. Matthew and the blood curse upon the Jews, which turns out to be a blessing for them and all nations. This evening, we consider the Passion account according to St. Mark.

One of the distinctive parts of St. Mark's passion narrative is found in ch. 14:51–52:

And a young man followed Him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. Thus far our sermon text for tonight.

At first this little detail of Mark's account might come across as rather trivial. Why would he include information about a streaker in his narrative? The first thing to realize is that in many contexts, the word for "naked" here can mean "stripped for battle." In those days, it was not uncommon to strip naked, or at least down to the undergarments, to fight. The young man may have had the linen cloth on as a covering he could quickly remove to engage in combat.

In the Upper Room, Jesus had told the disciples: "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27). Peter said: "Even though they all fall away, I will not . . . If I must die with you, I will not deny you." Of course, we often focus on Peter as he fulfills Jesus's prediction: "Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." But we often forget that "they all said the same." Not one of the disciples thought they would abandon our Lord. They were all going to fight with Him to the death.

When the priests and the scribes came to arrest Jesus, one of the bystanders cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. That's the only traditional combat we see, and Jesus puts a stop to it. Jesus doesn't respond with the sword, but with the sword of the spirit, His very word: "Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left Him and fled. It's not the soldiers and the priests and the scribes who retreated. It was the disciples who left Jesus and fled. All those who said they would never fall away even to the point of death fell away at the first sign of real trouble.

The anonymous young man who followed Jesus and then fled away naked is thought by many to be the Gospel writer himself, Mark. Here he becomes a picture of what all the apostles did. They were stripped for battle, ready to fight. But their covering was thin. When the battle came, they shamefully ran away naked. Those who are stripped for battle and then run away are cowards. They had words but no deeds to back up those words. Despite good outward appearance and preparation for the fight, they became deserters, every last one of them. That's because they weren't able to fight the good fight of Jesus Christ. The disciples were preparing for an earthly showdown, but even then they couldn't withstand. Jesus has to fight this battle alone,

a battle not with swords and clubs, but with the powers of darkness and with the wrath of God against sin. The disciples couldn't fight this battle. Only Jesus could.

Another thing to keep in mind with this text is the connection to creation and new creation. The theme of nakedness first comes at the beginning. Adam and Eve were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen 2:25). But when the man and the woman ate of the tree which they were commanded not to eat from, their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to make loincloths to cover their shame. And when God called to Adam: "Where are you?" Adam said: "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself" (Gen 3:10). It's interesting that humans are the only creatures ashamed of being naked. The shame associated with original sin is very much tied to the shame associated with nudity and sexuality. We have an impulse to hide the organs by which original sin and shame are propagated among the human race.

And so the Lord covers the nakedness of Adam and Eve with the skins of a sacrifice. And there's the promise to Eve that her offspring, her descendant, will crush the head of the serpent. Jesus Christ is that seed of the woman, born of woman. As original sin would continue down the generations, so, too, would the promise of the one to be born not of the sexual act but by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, miraculously preserved from the stain and the shame of original sin.

The young man runs away naked, but Jesus opens not His mouth as He is led peacefully like a lamb to the slaughter. When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they divided His garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each should take (Mark 15:24). Jesus was crucified naked. That was part of the shame of crucifixion. But another way of seeing this is that Jesus was stripped for battle. The young man in the Garden was stripped for battle, ready to fight to the end like the other apostles. Yet they all fell away. Jesus is stripped for battle and He goes off to war on the cross, fighting not for Himself but for His people, for all people, to rescue them from sin, death, and the Devil. As a good soldier, Jesus lays down His life for His friends. He lays down His life for you.

Joseph of Arimathaea bought a linen shroud to wrap up Jesus and lay Him in a tomb—a funeral pall for the leader fallen in battle. Jesus rises from the dead, the seed of the woman victorious over the serpent. And now Jesus covers you sin and your shame with Himself. In Holy Baptism He clothes you with Himself. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). Your sin is paid for. You are given "white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen." Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb who covers you and makes your garments white in His blood. In this greatest of battles you are victorious in Him. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.