

Pastor Luke C. Werre  
March 10, 2021  
Sermon Text: Mark 14:51-52  
Stripped Of All Dignity

The detail from the Passion History of Christ for our meditation tonight is something I remember hearing even as a child. The congregation would all be huddled together in the wooden pews of our little, white clapboard church, small in the vast country darkness, but bright and warm inside. My father would be wearing his black Geneva preaching gown reading from the King James Version. When the story came to this detail I always felt a little squeamish to hear it. And even today it is not entirely comfortable. To tell you the truth, in almost 30 years of ministry I have never before preached on this passage. Here it is: *A certain young man was following him, wearing just a linen cloth over his naked body. They seized him, but he left behind the linen cloth and fled from them naked.*

Doesn't that seem like a strange thing to include in the story of Jesus' sufferings and death? It leaves us with so many questions, but the biggest question is this: Why did the Holy Spirit think it was necessary for us to know this detail? Let's take a few minutes to see what blessing we can glean from this passage, for the purpose of every syllable of God's Word is to bless us and to save us.

First, the question begs, who was that young man? Mark is the only Gospel to include this detail and some have therefore surmised that Mark was writing about himself, like a personal, but nameless, confession, like the way John self-deprecatingly referred to himself only as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And what was that young man doing there? It's pretty clear he is not one of the Twelve. Again, some have conjectured that the upper room where Jesus and the Twelve celebrated the Passover earlier that evening was in the house of Mark's parents (based on a passage from the book of Acts). They say that young Mark tagged along to Gethsemane, though he wasn't actually invited.

Or was it just a random restless youth who had been sleeping in a house nearby and when he was awakened by all the commotion threw a blanket around himself to check it out? The bottom line is we don't know who the young man was or his motives for being there.

It would seem that perhaps the young man didn't belong there. It is worth noting that as Jesus was being arrested, in His miraculous way He ordered the soldiers to let the Twelve go, and the soldiers complied. Jesus provided the Twelve a clean way out. But He did not so overtly do the same for this young man with the sheet.

The Twelve are often condemned for abandoning Jesus in Gethsemane. That's the lesson we take away. Perhaps what we can learn from the young mystery man in the sheet, is how prone we are - even we who are seen to be in the vicinity of Jesus - how prone we are to abandon all propriety, every shred of moral dignity whether as a result of sinful curiosity, self-preservation, desperation or just being in the wrong place.

For example, how quickly does the Eighth Commandment fall to the ground - the command to defend and speak well of our neighbor - whether we're tearing apart a supervisor among coworkers or spewing toxic, vicious Tweets or cruelly destroying a schoolmate on Snapchat. And we actually think it's funny. What ghastly spirits are we?

How easily the pretense of humility slips off when naked vanity posts on Facebook, "Look at these awesome pictures of our family vacation! Look at my amazing children! Look at our fantastic life and what wonderful people we are!" We'll use the word 'blessed' -we're so blessed - so people know we're modest. "And listen to my all-important opinions on every topic! And if you disagree I will shout you down. Or unfriend you."

How quickly the shroud of decency is shrugged off when by just a click we give our eyes to devour things that should only be reserved between a husband and wife in the privacy of their bedroom.

How suddenly the covering of self-control is pulled off when it comes to food, or spending, or alcohol, or when our temper is triggered. When anxiety and pessimism take over and faith in God's promises is yanked away to bare paranoia.

There are the moments of terror when we realize anyone with a little insight could point out, "You are a coward! You were a coward when you should have had courage. You weren't there for those who needed you. You haven't carried your own weight, haven't done any real work; you offer nothing of real substance that contributes to the cause. You're just an empty cardboard box. Just faking your way through." It feels like only a matter of time before someone discovers this, like only a thin sheet barely hides the truth about you.

Our shame is no less stark than the shame of the young man in the garden from whom the last vestige of modesty was unceremoniously ripped. But it's not other people who give us such shame. No, if we feel shame, it comes from that fact that God is all-knowing and holy and He judges all. He knows the naked reality about us - more vividly than even we do ourselves.

But rather than attempting to tear away and run *from* God, tonight I'd like to invite you to do something counter-intuitive. I'd like to encourage you to flee *to* God. More specifically, to His Son Jesus Christ. With Him you'll be in good company. You see, Jesus knows shame. He is up to His armpits in it. Not because of any sin or guilt of His own. Rather, God the Father loaded down on Jesus the shame of the guilt of the world including yours. As He hung on the cross, Jesus was stripped of all dignity. Imagine how awful it would feel to have your worst moments exposed just to the people in this room. Jesus hung on the cross in full sight and fully exposed to the damning disapproval of the Almighty God. Because He endured that horror and punishment our shame before God is taken away and erased.

A popular old-time hymn prays: *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling: Naked, come to thee for dress, Helpless, look to thee for grace.* It's OK if you come to Jesus naked with shame, if you have no way to hide your sin and nothing to offer Him but your sin. That's the way He wants it. He intends to cover you, to clothe you with robe of righteousness, to wrap you around in a blanket of holiness. He does it with the words, "Your sins are forgiven!" That makes you acceptable to God. Not guilty. It saves you. It dresses you for heaven.

In his Gospel, Mark speaks of a "young man" one other time - in the final chapter. This time it says a young man in a white robe was sitting inside the empty tomb of Jesus announcing that He had risen. In this setting there is nothing mentioned about shame or embarrassment or guilt or someone trying to flee from captors. There is only surprise, only delight, only relief, only welcome to come and have a look. So come, have a look. Peer inside. The only thing that will capture you here is Christ's love. Here is your new reality that you are welcomed into the conversation of heaven. Here is your future that you too will rise from the grave in glory as Jesus did. Here you are forever clothed with salvation.

