

Greetings dear friends in Christ! His grace and peace be with you all!

As you know, Jesus had many fans and followers at the Palm Sunday parade, but these fans began to disappear as His cross drew near! Mark 14 tells us that when Jesus was captured in Gethsemane none of His closest disciples followed Him. Instead that “they all forsook Jesus and fled!” Then in vs. 51 and 52 of Mark 14 we read our text: “*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.*”

Heavenly Father, separate us to yourself more and more through Your Truth. Your Word IS truth. Amen.

This summer at a 4th of July parade in Minnesota I watched an army veteran march by with the American flag held high. I’ve often placed my hand over my heart to honor our flag; but I’ve never carried it!

Thousands of brave soldiers, have fought and died for our country in the past 50 years. I have prayed for them, but I have never been a soldier.

I am a fan of the SC “*Gamecocks*” and the MN *Vikings*, but neither team wants me to play for them! Surely there are many times when we all find it more comfortable and even necessary to be mere fans and onlookers, while others carry the flag, fight, or play the game. But when it comes to our calling as disciples and followers of Christ,

OUR LORD WANTS FLAG-BEARERS AND SOLDIERS!

I.

The young man mentioned in our text was probably John Mark himself. In Gethsemane, he may have felt comfortable in his fine linen garment. But when Jesus was captured and the disciples scattered, Mark left his garment and fled in fear!

Mark had been a follower of Jesus, as a young recruit. He had received some “basic training” through Jesus’ teaching and the testimony of Peter, his close relative. But, as things heated up for Mark he chose to desert Jesus and run into the cool darkness of the night, rather than stand with Him!

Yet the Lord did not desert Mark! His story continues in the Book of Acts. We learn that Paul took Mark along on the apostle’s *first* missionary journey. All went well on the island of Cyprus. But later, along the coast of Asia Minor, Mark *deserted* Paul and his fellow missionaries (*Acts 15:38*)!

When Paul and Barnabas were planning their *second* missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along. But Paul was so opposed to the idea, that he and Barnabas separated. Barnabas took Mark with him back to Cyprus. Then, later, near the end of Paul’s life in Rome, he wrote to Timothy: “Get Mark. Bring him with you, for he is *useful to me for ministry.*” (*2Tim. 4:11*)

Mark knew that he would face danger with Paul in Rome, but he went anyway. By God’s grace, Mark became a real flag-bearer and a soldier of Christ! According to tradition, Mark died a martyr’s death.

II.

Remember little Zacchaeus? He wanted to sit high in the shade of the sycamore, comfortably watching Jesus in the parade below. Instead, the Lord said: "Make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." (*Lk. 19:1-5*)

As our Lord Jesus passes by and calls us by His Gospel, He wants us to move along with Him, lest we be lost and torn away from Him. "*For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth he confesses unto salvation.*" (*Rom. 10:10*)

Our confession of Jesus in word and deed is vitally important to Him and to us! For He says: "*Whosoever confesses Me before men, Him will I confess before My Father in heaven; Whosoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in heaven.*" (*Mt.10:33*)

Jesus hung on the cross for all of us; but He hung between two evil doers. The one on the left *mocked* Jesus, but the one on the right *confessed* Jesus, and said to Him: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom!" Our Savior made him a flag-bearer and a soldier of the cross late in life, and then took him safely from the field of battle!

For young pastor Timothy the fight was much longer! As the apostle Paul encouraged him, so he encourages us: "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life!" (*1Tim. 6:12*) Being a Christian is not a spectator sport! We are in a fight right now against the forces of evil that would tear us away from our Savior!

How are we doing in the "good fight of faith"? Since the beginning of the service, have we fought hard against the flesh's daydreaming and our thoughts about what we are going to do after the service ends? Are we fighting to resist the Enemy who is always trying to snatch God's Word from us? Do we see ourselves as spectators or flag bearers and soldiers?

III.

We know the fight grows fiercer beyond our church pews! Tens of thousands of Christians have been thrown to the lions, burned at the stake, crucified, and beheaded as flag-bearers and soldiers of the cross! *Even now*, our brothers and sisters in Christ overseas are being persecuted by heathen neighbors and hostile rulers!

Are we inspired by their courage for Christ? Can we take even a *little* of the "heat" they are suffering in the fight of faith? We have not faced ferocious beasts or fires in our communities. But are we willing to suffer the "fire" of a face flushed with resentment toward us because we object to a dirty story or curse word?

Do you have a friend who believes the godless theory of evolution? What if you told your friend that the first three chapters of *the Bible* tell us that the God who created all things "in the beginning," is the SAME God who promised the Savior when man fell into sin? What if you said, "I am a sinner who needs a Creator-God and the Savior He sent? *What about you?*"

Suppose you were told that Jews, Moslems, and Christians believe in the same God, or that people who do more good than bad will get to heaven. What if you said that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" but God laid the sins of all the world upon His eternal Son Jesus Christ! He is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life for sinful mankind. I beg you to trust in Him alone!"

Maybe at such times, you felt uncomfortable as the heat rose up around you and your face became flushed! But the *discomfort* passes, and the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit rushes in! *Mark*

learned to live with it – to be UNcomfortable AND to be COMFORTED. SO WILL WE!

Paul shared the Good News of Christ, but he was often rejected and beaten near to death. In Philippi he was in a most uncomfortable dungeon. Yet he and Silas sang hymns of praise in the night by the Savior's light!

In Acts 23 we learn that Paul's own people threw him in jail! But that night Jesus appeared to him and said, "Take courage!" Then the Lord comforted Paul with His Word, so that he might continue comforting others with the Gospel of salvation.

Like Mark, Paul, and Timothy, we also may *take courage* in the Gospel of Christ. For it tells us that "all authority in heaven and earth" has been *given* to HIM who sends us to "*make disciples.*" His Word assures us that He will be "*with us even to the end of the age!*" (Matt. 28:20)

Take courage in His promise that through your testimony HIS Word "*will accomplish what He pleases, and prosper where He sends it!*" For HIS "*gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.*" (Rom. 1:16)

Take courage as you share the saving Gospel of Christ, for because of it you are the salt-preservative and light of this dying world! The more we study God's Word, come to Bible Class, or review the Catechism, the more we become better prepared and find courage to be Christ's witnesses – His soldiers and flag bearers!

This is what our Savior wants for each of us! If we love Him and our neighbor, what shall we do? Instead of fearfully fleeing from the world whenever it grabs onto our comfortable outer garments in this life, let us hold fast to the garment of Christ's righteousness and *fight to COVER our fellow sinners with it!*

At Okabena's 4th of July parade, I watched from the comfort of a shade tree, as candy was being tossed to the children. Who doesn't like to give out candy? Who doesn't prefer to always speak sweetly to others? But the Word of our God "is sweeter than honey" to sinners like us who find His grace! So then, should we NOT leave the comfort of our shade trees to throw out the sweet message of mercy and forgiveness in Christ to others? OF COURSE!

So let us pray: O Lord, if, at times, we have felt the heat and fled the scene, forgive us! Make us more than fans and spectators. Be patient with us, as You were with John Mark. Put your own *MARK* upon us as your flag-bearers and soldiers! Grant us your grace to be *ALL* that YOU want us to be! Amen!