



## Sermon of April 16, 2000



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### "WHO IS THIS MAN?"

Mark 14:12-25

Mark 14:26-52

Mark 15:25-39

I am sure you have all seen old group photographs of school classes, athletic teams, or church groups. We have a lot of those in our own archives. Under the photograph there will be a list, seated from left to right, and the names of the people will be listed there.

Other times there are pictures that do not have names. They are so old that there is nobody living who knows the people in the photo. Some historical society, or institution such as ours, will publish that picture and print a sentence which says, "If anyone knows anyone in this picture, will you please contact us."

I want us to look this morning at the lesson that was read to us from the Gospel of Mark, the

second lesson, the story of the Garden of Gethsemane and the arrest of Jesus. I want you to look at it as if it were one of those old photographs.

Have in your mind now the picture that Mark draws of the arrest. Over here are the disciples. There is a group of ten of them, two are missing from this group. But you could probably name the ten that are there, or somebody could name them for you.

One of the two that are missing is Judas. He left after the supper, did not accompany the disciples and Jesus to the garden. But he is there now, over on the other side of the picture, with what Mark calls the "crowd." They came with swords and clubs to arrest him. You can see Judas there easily in that crowd.

Of course, in the center of the picture, there is Jesus. He is the most easily recognizable of all of the characters in the picture. The man next to him, holding a sword, attacking one of the party that Judas brought to the arrest, is Peter. We assume that that is Peter.

So that accounts for everybody, except one. Clear over here on this side, on the border, almost out of the picture, there is another man. Now a lot of people have looked at this photograph, and have never even noticed that man. But there he is. He is apparently naked, except for a sheet that is wrapped around his body. Do you see him over there? This is the way that Mark describes him.

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.

Anybody know this man?

Well he is there in the picture. People have been asking for two thousand years, who is this man? Does anybody know who this man is?

Lets look at the text more carefully. Maybe we can discover who he is. Here is the scene. It's the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has gone with his disciples to the garden to pray, to be by himself, which was his custom. It comes immediately after the Last Supper. We know that he went directly from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. He is there with the disciples. He asks the disciples, "Will you watch while I pray?" That is to say, "Will you stand guard?" They say, "Yes," and then fall asleep.

Then Judas, who betrayed him, comes with a crowd to arrest him. Peter draws a sword to defend his Lord. We assume it's Peter. In John's gospel he's identified as Peter. Mark just says, one of them drew a sword. But we know it was Peter. It's got to be Peter. It is the sort of impetuous, dumb thing that Peter would do.

Then Judas kisses Jesus to identify him. Then they arrest him. And Jesus says to the mob, "Have you come out against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me then. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." And then this line. "And they all forsook him, and fled." Which, of course, refers to the disciples.

Then we come to it, this strange passage.

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.

Anybody know this man?

Well, as I said, they have been trying for two thousand years to find out who he is. There are several theories about who he is. The most popular until recently is that this is John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark. The theory is that he was the son of the woman from whom Jesus and the disciples rented the room. The theory is that he had gone to bed on that Thursday night, and was awakened with the disciples and Jesus leaving the house. Curious, he got up, wrapped a sheet around himself, obviously he slept without a nightie, and then followed them into the garden. Therefore he witnessed Jesus praying. He witnessed the disciples sleeping. He witnessed the arrest. He witnessed the flight of the disciples. And when they took Jesus away, he followed them. When the soldiers saw him, they grabbed him, and he fled, leaving them holding the linen cloth.

Now that was the theory. This was John Mark, who witnessed the scene and then later wrote down what he had seen. For many it explained why this strange reference is here in the Gospel of Mark. No other gospel records this. This is exclusive to Mark. It serves no salutary purpose, no edification. It's just like a footnote in this story.

Or it's like Alfred Hitchcock, you remember, who always put himself into his pictures. For just a fleeting moment, just a second, he was there. It was always fun to watch an Alfred Hitchcock movie to see if you could see his famous profile for just the second it appeared on the screen. It was his signature on all his movies.

Maybe John Mark was doing the same thing. Maybe he was putting himself in this picture just to let us know that he was there. He saw it all. He was caught, and ran away, to tell the story another day.

So to the question, "Anybody know this man?" some have said, "I bet you that's John Mark, the author of the gospel. He just put himself there in the picture so we would know that he was there."

But others are not satisfied with that. They are like Sherlock Holmes, they are suspicious of the obvious. They return to the scene, look at evidence again, and look for more evidence. They look outside of the context. They study to see if they can learn something about the situation.

An awful lot of biblical research, incidentally, is just that. It's detective work. It's following clues. It's looking at the evidence. And lo and behold, they found something. Of course it is still a theory, but it intrigues me. They noticed that this scene has some interesting parallels to baptism, as it was practiced in the early Church.

In the early Church baptisms were frequently secret. They were not public affairs like they are today, in a church, into which anybody could come, because they had no churches in those

days, nothing like this. They were held at night, usually just before the dawn, outside, at a secluded spot for security reasons, in a garden, or orchard, where there would be water for the baptism.

We also know that those being baptized removed their clothes. They went into the water naked, were immersed, and then came out as if reborn, a new person. Then they put a linen cloth around them as they came out of the baptistry. And in Greek, the word for that linen cloth is "sindon."

Now this is the most intriguing clue. The white linen cloth that the young man wears in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark calls a "sindon." It is the same word used for the garment worn by those who have just been baptized, who are, in other words, new Christians, who are now members of the Church. Anybody know this man?

Here's another clue. He follows Jesus part of the way. At least he followed father than the disciples. You can say that for him. All the disciples forsook him and fled at the arrest. But this man, at least, followed him out of the garden, part of the way to the cross, until he was recognized. Threatened with arrest himself, he too fled, like everybody else. Do you know him now?

I think I do. He's not a disciple, we know that. They are all accounted for in this picture. He is a baptized Christian. That is to say, he is an "ordinary" Christian. Now you know who it is. It's you and me.

Old Mark did not put himself into this picture. He put you and me there. It is just like Mark to do that. He doesn't want you to get away with saying that this is just an interesting record of an event that took place two thousand years ago. And he doesn't want you to say either that this is just about some well meaning, but bumbling disciples, who when the going gets tough, get going in the opposite direction. He won't let you get away with that. He puts you right there in the picture, in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the arrest, and wants you to think about it. What would I have done if I had been there?

You see, Mark isn't teasing us the way Alfred Hitchcock used to play with his audience. Mark has tricked us the way Hamlet tricked the king to catch his conscience with the play within a play. The king thinks that he is watching a play about somebody else, about someone long ago and far away, only to discover half way through the play, this is about me. "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."

If this were a photograph, and beneath it were the names from left to right, we could point over here and say, there's Peter, James and John, Andrew, Philip, and all the other disciples. Kneeling in the center, that's Jesus of Nazareth. Over here in the corner, name unknown.

He followed Jesus part of the way, then he ran away too. Anybody know this man? I'll tell you why I think Mark put that stranger there, so that you and I will say, that's me.

Now you will probably be able to say, I don't recall ever fleeing. I don't recall anything that appears in this photograph. And it probably has never been that way for you as it is described

here. No soldiers have ever come to arrest you, I would imagine. You have never been in a secret hiding place, waiting for all this to blow over. It wasn't that way at all for you. But maybe it was something like this.

Clarence Jordan founded the Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia. Incidentally, Habitat for Humanity grew out of that Christian experiment in Georgia. Habitat's headquarters even today are in Americus, Georgia. Clarence Jordan founded the Koinonia Farm, I suppose, over a generation ago as an experiment in Christian living. There was great opposition to what he was trying to do. He was trying to establish a Christian community across racial lines, and to focus on the poverty that existed in that part of Georgia. So it was an experiment in cooperative farming, and it met with great resistance, even with violence. But most of all it met with a steady stream of legal challenges.

Clarence went to his brother Robert, who was an attorney. Later he became a State Senator, and after that a Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court. He went to his brother Robert, and asked his brother (who was then a country lawyer) if he could help out by representing the farm. Robert said, "I can't do that. You know my political aspirations. If I represented you, I would lose everything." Then he said to Clarence, "You see, it's different for you."

Clarence said, "Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the Church on the same Sunday as boys. And I expect that when we came forward the preacher asked me the same question that he asked you, 'Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?' I said, 'Yes.' What did you say?"

Robert said, "Clarence, I follow Jesus up to a point."

Clarence replied, "Would that point by any chance be the cross?"

"That's right," Robert said. "I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I am not going to get crucified."

Then Clarence said, "I don't think you're a disciple. I think you are an admirer of Jesus, not a disciple. I think you ought to go back to that church that you belong to and tell them that you are an admirer of Jesus, not a disciple."

How would you like to have a brother like Clarence Jordan, putting it to you all the time? Well Mark is doing the same thing, more gently, more subtly, but it's the same thing. He is saying, it wasn't just the disciples who forsook him and fled. There was a young person there, dressed in baptismal garb. Which reminds us that he had been asked at his baptism, just as we have been asked, "Will you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" If he were a Methodist, he would have also been asked, "And will you pledge your allegiance to his Kingdom?"

You see, that's what he left behind when he fled. Not just a linen cloth. He left behind his baptismal vow. So anybody know this man?

Mark doesn't put this in the story just to condemn us. That's not his purpose. He's not interested in that. He put this here so that you will see that the Bible does not talk about everybody else, it

talks about you. And maybe when your guard is down, and you are not expecting a confrontation (because we all hate confrontations), but maybe at your devotional time, and you are reading the Bible, and it hits you, that's me. That could be me.

So I ask you again, anybody know this man?

The reason I ask that is that he may not have heard. He fled, you know, so he may not have heard this. After he fled, Jesus was tried, and on that same day was put on a cross. From the cross he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

*Help us to be masters of ourselves,  
that we might be servants of others,  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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