

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 they began to disappear as His cross drew near. Mark tells us in chapter 14 that none of Jesus' closest disciples *chose to follow Him*. Mark tells us instead "they all forsook Jesus and fled!" Then in vs. 51 and 52 we read: "*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.*"

O LORD, separate us to yourself more and more through Your Truth. Your Word IS truth. Amen.

Two years ago I stood on a street in Okabena, MN, watching the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade. Who does not love a patriotic parade as it passes by with the American flag held high? I have 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'm a huge 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 of our text was probably Mark himself. When Jesus was captured in Gethsemane His disciples scattered into the darkness. But Mark tells us that when some men grabbed hold of him, he left his garment in their hands and fled naked in fear!

Mark had been a follower of Jesus, as a young recruit. He had received "basic training" through Jesus' teaching and from Peter, his close relative. Each of you has also received this basic training from your Savior's Word. *What are you doing with it?*

When things heated up for Mark, he chose to desert Jesus and run into the cool darkness of the night! The good news is that the Lord did *not* desert Mark! His story goes on 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.

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. 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.

Uncaring Jonah loved the shade of the fig tree more than he loved the wicked Ninevites! 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 is 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 between two evil doers. The one on the left *mocked* Jesus, but the one on the right *confessed* Him, and said: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom!” Our Savior made him a flag-bearer and a soldier *late* in life, and then took him from the field of battle to eternal rest!

For young pastor Timothy the fight was much longer! As the apostle Paul encouraged him, so he says to 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! Are we fighting to resist the Enemy who is always trying to snatch God’s Word from us? Do we lack courage to stand with Jesus *for* others? Are we spectators or flag bearers and soldiers?

In Acts 23 we learn that Paul’s own Jewish people threw him in jail for sharing the Gospel! 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* as we share His Gospel. It is Christ, to Whom “all authority in heaven and earth” has been *given*, Who sends us to “make disciples”! It is Christ Who promises that He will be *“with” us “even to the end of the age”!* (Matt. 28:20)

Take courage in His promise that *HIS Word “will accomplish what He pleases and prosper where He sends it”!* (Isaiah 55:11) For HIS *“gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.”* (Rom. 1:16)

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 us all!

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 persecuted by heathen neighbors and hostile rulers! Are we inspired by their courage for Christ? We have not yet faced ferocious beasts or fires in our communities! Can we take even a *little* of the “heat” suffered by others in the fight of faith?

Maybe 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 teach us* that the God who created all things 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 and the Savior He sent? *What about you?*”

Suppose someone told you 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*” (Rom. 6:23), 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!*”

Having spoken of Christ to others in love, you may feel the HEAT rise around you, OR a kind of fiery discomfort as your own face turns red! But the *uncomfortable* feeling passes, and the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit *rushes* in! *Mark learned* to be UNcomfortable AND to be comforted – so can we!

At Okabena’s 4<sup>th</sup> 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 does not prefer to always speak sweetly to others? But the Word of our God “*is sweeter than honey*” (Ps. 19:10) to sinners LIKE US who know His love and 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 Mark. Put your own MARK upon us as your flag-bearers and soldiers! Grant us more grace to be ALL that YOU want us to be! Amen!