

Running From Jesus
Mark 14:43-51
Palm Sunday
April 5, 2020
The Grace Place Church



Introduction:

This may be the most unusual Palm Sunday that we have had in awhile. We had plans of a joint service with lots of activity with our kids. We had our plans. The Lord has a way of changing our plans. We are still having a "joint service" but we are doing it virtually this week. We still have activities for our children although they look different than we had planned. So, what does God have to say to us in this season on this Palm Sunday.

The sections in the gospels that cover the week beginning as Palm Sunday and leading to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection have many varied and deeply profound theological meanings. We could talk about his triumphant entry into Jerusalem where the crowds proclaim him king and then a few days later scream for his execution. We could talk about his lament over Jerusalem. Looking at what could have been but wasn't due to the rejection he suffered at the hands of the ones who should have received him with open arms. We've chosen to put our focus for this Palm Sunday on the moment in which he was arrested and the place where we find a streaker in scripture. I want to pray and then look at the text. **(Prayer)**

Bible Study:

West Texas Life is one of the favorite things I've ever experienced. The folks in West Texas are friendly, open, and profoundly honest. I remember sitting at the Ranchland Country Club in Midland interviewing for a ministry position at the Golf Course Road Church. I was just making conversation. I asked one of the elder's wives, "I know that Midland and Odessa are only a few miles apart. What is the difference in the two cities? She smiled a coy little smile and said, "Honey-Midland is where you go to raise a family-Odessa is where you go to raise Cain." I knew I was in quite a place.

I was standing behind a very distinguished elderly lady at the Midland International Airport and she was stressed to the nines. Now, dressed to the nines in West Texas means you are wearing a lot of metal. She obviously hadn't flown a lot and walked through the metal detector at the airport without removing all of that metal. It went into tilt mode. The security folks stopped her and she started removing stuff. He asked for her belt, her jewelry-she looked at him and said, "Honey, if you ask for anything else, you are going to have to put money on the table. It was a funny but awkward moment. This is an award moment in scripture. Take a look...

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man;

arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. Mark 14:43-51.

This young man shows up and then disappears. We don't have a clue who this young man is... some say, maybe this is Mark's story. Who knows? The real question that I have is **Why does Mark have this here? Mark's gospel is the only gospel that mentions this young man. My guess is there are clues embedded in the text from the very beginning.**

When Jesus began his ministry everyone was in. Crowds were following him everywhere. They would leave anything to go follow him. He was the “**Jesus of Nazareth Miracle Show.**” the “**Traveling Jesus Salvation Review.**” He was the hottest ticket in town-his concerts were selling out. His booking agent couldn't meet all of the demands. They liked what he was selling-they liked what he was delivering. The message of good news-the confrontation of the demons-the healing of the sick.

In Mark 1, people were working on their nets and he invites them to follow him. They drop everything to do it. There is a paralytic-his friends are so desperate to get him to Jesus they cut a hole in the roof to drop him down to Him. They'll do anything to get to Him. A man name Jairus is desperate because of his daughters condition-while he is taking Jesus to her, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years breaks her way through the crowd just to touch Him. Everybody wants a piece of Jesus.

In the middle of all of this, Mark has some summary statements so the reader doesn't miss what is happening. These statements are in Mark 1, 3 and 6. Let's pay attention to what Mark is trying to tell us about how they all want a piece of this wonder worker.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Mark 1: 35-37.

He can't get away. Everyone is trying to reach the traveling wonder show called Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Mark 3:7-8.

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them,

because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. Mark 6:32-34.

They are leaving everyone and everything to get to Jesus. They leave nets, business, careers... they all want to get a touch from this wonder worker-this miracle man. And, this press to get to Jesus reaches its pinnacle on Palm Sunday.

In Mark 11, on Palm Sunday, Jesus walks into Jerusalem. Instead of having to track him down, he is coming there. He comes to the place where all of the action is at this time of year. As he enters, they are throwing palm branches down and they are saying Hosanna to he who comes in the name of the Lord. Good news-the salvation show has come to town-it's time for God to do God's work in our midst. That's Chapter 11. **For eleven chapters in Mark's Gospel, people are dropping everything to get to Jesus.**

In Mark 14, Jesus makes the prediction that all of these people who have been applauding him will bail on him. **He evokes imagery for Zechariah 13 where the shepherd will be struck and the sheep will scatter.** Peter says, If everyone else leaves, I got your back. The rest of the disciples nod in agreement. One by one they start bailing. In Chapters 14 and 15 person after person leaves Jesus. **Peter says three times, I don't even know the man.**

Judas shows up with the temple cops. A betrayal kiss is offered. The music changes from major chords to minor chords and a young man instead of dropping everything he's got to get to Jesus, now will drop everything he's got including the clothes he's wearing to slip away from him. I don't think it's accidental that Mark throws in a stalker story. They grab his robe-he has the option to stay and explain or running away and he'd rather run as a stalker than stand with Jesus.

The question for us at the beginning of Holy Week is...**Why The Change?** Why does the story go from standing ovations to running away. **The answer of course is the cross.** Until this moment, we could infuse our own definition of the Messiah on him. He's a **wonder worker.** He's the **blessor**, the **therapist**, the giver of **better marriages, better lives, better health, better jobs, better finances.** That Jesus can give you your best life now and drum up all the support in the world. If it is all about me being blessed, I'll flock to Jesus all day long.

Illustration: I read a blog recently in which the author compares the blurbs on the backs of best selling Christian books with the blurbs on the front of Men's Health Magazine. The title of the article is Better Sex, Better Abs, and Jesus. He gives quotes from Christian books and Men's Health and you are supposed to be able to figure out from where the quotes came. Trust me when I tell you its not easy.

- 1. "Build your perfect life and strip away stress for good"-Front Cover of Men's Magazine***
- 2. "The Secret to Effortless Success"-Back Cover of Christian Book***
- 3. "Keep Yourself Happy"-Back Cover of Christian Book***
- 4. "10 Essential Success Secrets"-Front Cover of Men's Magazine***
- 5. "Living Life without Limits"-Back Cover of Christian Book***

His point was we've turned Jesus back into the traveling show. **He's there to reach you, touch you, heal everything, and your life is always blessed. And for that, people will flock to Jesus. For this other Jesus-this going to the cross Jesus-they would rather disrobe and**

get away. He told them three times in Mark's gospel what the Son of Man would suffer. But you don't believe it until you see it and here it is.

This young man, Peter, the disciples now see the clubs, the torches, the betrayal kiss... this is not the story they signed up for. They signed up for the "take over the throne of David story." Yet, here they are with the clubs and temple cops and everyone runs away. Including this young man who leaves his robe and runs away naked. Next you have the trials, the taunts, the whips, the time before Pilate, and finally six hours one Friday when he is crucified.

As you read it, this all feels like bad news. Jesus is not the guy everyone hoped he would be. He's not the traveling Jesus wonder show. Run away if you can, streak away if you have to, but by all means, abandon ship.

On the other hand, if you find yourself as someone who has been broken and who has embraced their brokenness this story rings true for you. It is the story of one who bore our sins and sorrows. Of one who stormed the gates of hell...of one who took on death. One who went through the sorrows of this life. He knows what it is like to be abandoned. He knows what it feels like to be forsaken. He knows what it looks like when everyone runs away.

If your eyes have been opened to the injustices of the world-the lostness of the world... you are going to look at this and it resonates. You don't serve a God who escapes but rather he is one who enters right in the middle of our darkness. Listen carefully. **If you have finally entered the place where you desire the presence of Jesus more than the blessings of Jesus-this is good news.**

My spiritual life has always been dogged with questions. In my professional life as a minister, I have always felt that I wasn't enough. That I never could meet the expectations of the groups to whom I was called to minister. I constantly felt the disappointment of some who wanted more confidence. They needed miracles; I loved mystery. They loved The Prayer of Jabez; I was embarrassed by it. They turned to scripture as an answer book; I found in it life's greatest questions (along with an "answer" in Jesus). They saw it as the inerrant blueprint for dating, marriage, job, etc.; I trusted it as my spiritual community's library of faith. They wanted confident prayers expelling Satan and claiming spiritual victories; I turned to the Lord's Prayer. They spotted God's healing everywhere they turned; I kept performing funerals. They wanted sermons where everyone could shout "Amen!"; I preached anticipating quiet nods, thoughtful expressions, and eyes moist with hope. But at age 59, I'm thankful for this faith that has survived. Doubt-filled, less-than-confident faith. I've given up thinking that if I just try harder I'll have the assurance others seem to have. I will groan, long, wait, and hope. For I'm a believer in the resurrection of Jesus. That's why this story matters. I need a God who enters into my darkness and redeems it-into the times that I have doubted him and run away, yet he still loves and pursues me.

This moment is awkward! It still feels awkward to have a streaker in the Bible. We've had a lot of people streak away from Jesus. We understand the young man who ran because there have been times we have run away from Jesus too. **We have been invited into the story again not in a robe we discarded... not as a person who has betrayed and run from Jesus... but because of this moment, with his sacrifice and resurrection we are "dressed in his righteousness alone-faultless to stand before the throne." And we wait for Easter...**