

## Mark 14:48-52

<sup>48</sup>"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? <sup>49</sup>Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." <sup>50</sup>Then everyone deserted him and fled.

<sup>51</sup>A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, <sup>52</sup>he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Dear Lenten believers, fellow watchers of God's plan of salvation.

In the safety of the Upper Room the disciples spoke bravely. **"Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you"** (Matthew 26:35). **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will"** (Matthew 26:33). **"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death"** (Luke 22:33). And now, a few hours later, Jesus' disciples were running for their lives, while Jesus was tied up and led away to judgment and death. If ever words came back to haunt people, these were the words.

It's a sad fact about courage. We feel it most when we need it the least and when we need it the most, it slips away. Before their fear-filled actions in Gethsemane, the disciples knew what they were supposed to do. Stand with Christ! Stand up for Jesus! Never leave him or forsake him! But in the darkness of the garden, where there were soldiers with torches and swords and clubs, the courage that the disciples had so strongly felt at suppertime vanished.

Why did the disciples scatter like scared rabbits in the garden? The answer is simple and sad: their trust in Jesus had slipped away. Jesus once walked across water to rescue them. Jesus commanded a gale-force wind to stop. But now they feared that if they would stay with him, they would be doomed.

Doom doesn't threaten us too often. And yet, like the disciples on that sad Thursday night so long ago, we sometimes find ourselves tempted to run away when our Lord wants us to stand. And, to our sorrow and shame, we run away for the same reason – a lack of trust in Jesus. That is why we must pray: **Forgive Our Fearful Lack of Trust! 1) We abandon our Lord when our faith is weakest. 2) Father, increase our faith.**

### I.

The disciples never thought of themselves as cowards. They never considered themselves to be braggarts either. They really loved Jesus, and they really wanted to be his loyal followers. When they said those things about staying with him through thick and thin, they meant them—every word!

But how soon the disciples' boasting turned to fear! The most festive night of the Jewish year, the Passover, became a nightmare. They saw Jesus' sorrow during the supper and heard him once again speaking of his rejection and betrayal and death. They felt a darkness that was deeper than the night as they walked to the olive grove called Gethsemane. Worn out by sorrow and worry, they fell asleep while Jesus prayed, even after he had asked them to keep watch with him. Stunned, they watched as Judas betrayed Jesus to his enemies. Confused and frightened, they then ran and hid while their Lord was tied up and led away to trial.

Jesus had foreseen it. Again and again Jesus had warned them about the weakness of their faith. When storms at sea threatened them and they cried out in despair, he asked them where their trust in him had gone. When some insurmountable trouble came up—a huge crowd and no food to feed them—he would wonder why they had lost their faith in him. Finally, Jesus had sighed, **"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"** (Luke 18:8).

Just hours earlier, he had reminded them of a prophecy: **"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered"** (Mark 14:27). One disciple would betray him; another would deny him; all the others, as he put it, would **"fall away on account of me"** (Matthew 26:31). None of the disciples believed these things would happen. All of them had protested. And now these things were coming horribly true.

Jesus had told them exactly what was going to happen. And he had taught them again and again what he was here to do: to give his life for the sins of all people. Earlier John the Baptist had told them clearly, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29).

Yet somehow they still harbored ideas of an earthly king and of glory and honor in this world. So when Jesus didn't lift a finger to stop the temple guards from arresting him, the disciples panicked. What was Jesus doing? Why didn't he fight? Why didn't he summon those 12 legions of angels to defend himself from his enemies? The disciples didn't know. They were scared. They lost all their hope that Jesus would make things

turn out right in the end. And with their faith in him shattered, they ran in fear.

That same lack of trust can quickly lead us to abandon our Lord as well. Like the disciples, we find courage is easier to come up with when we don't really need it. We say that we will stand fast. We won't give in. We will fight the good fight of faith! It's easy here, in church, to make the promises of everlasting loyalty to Christ. But get out from behind these walls; deal with that world of sin and temptation and see what happens!

And our fears are so much less than those of the disciples. They abandoned Jesus to save their lives. We abandon Jesus so that we won't be laughed at or thought to be foolish, or so that we won't miss out on something that we feel would be very enjoyable. We know what Jesus did for us. We know that he has forgiven our sins. Yet we find it so hard to forgive others. We know what his commandments say, but we fail to keep them.

It is the same sad story: Our lack of trust leads to foolish fear. We don't think he is leading us to a place that is safe and good for us. Instead of trusting that our Good Shepherd knows where he is leading us, we fear that he has taken a wrong turn. We fear that he is leading us into some place we don't want to be. It looks like it may not be pleasant. It looks as if he doesn't know what he's doing.

And so we run from Jesus, driven by foolish fears! We abandon him, as surely as the disciples did, when our faith and trust in him grow weak.

## II.

That is why we need to pray every day: "Father, increase our faith!" When our trust in our Savior is at its lowest point that is when our prayers must rise to their highest intensity. God forbid that we should run away from him because our faith has grown weak! He has certainly done nothing to deserve such a lack of confidence from us.

"Lord Jesus," we pray, "teach us once again the wisdom of your commandments." If we would just study the commandments and think through the ways he would have us go, how quickly we could put to rest our foolish fears! God knows what he is doing. Our Creator certainly knows the best paths on which to lead us. We truly have nothing to fear.

That is why we study the stories in the Bible, so we might see again and again how true it is that **"in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"** (Romans 8:28). That is why we remain faithful to the sacraments by which the Lord increases our faith and decreases our fears. Do you fear sometimes that he may lead you to a dark and bad place and leave you in the lurch? Then remember your baptism, the day he claimed you through the washing of water with the Word and told all the world, "I have cleansed him; he is mine. I will never leave him or forsake him." Do you fear that Jesus may not always have your best interests at heart as he leads you on a sometimes confusing and frightening path? Then come to his table. As you eat that bread and drink that wine, remember the dark road he traveled alone so that he could purchase your forgiveness with the sacrifice of his body and his blood.

"Lord," we pray, "help us trust your wisdom in all things, even if actual dangers should come from our following where your Son leads us." The Christian life is not a cakewalk; God has made it abundantly clear to us that troubles will plague us if we follow him. We "walk in danger all the way," as the hymn puts it. But it was his wisdom that mapped out the route of our salvation through a path that was filled with pain and fear. He will never lead us into any place where his Son has not already been and has not already conquered all that we might fear. Jesus assures us, **"Take heart! I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33).

Never fear that the Lord doesn't know what is best for us when he points out the way for us to follow him. Never think that we are better suited to figure out the best path for our lives, rather rely on our Savior to know and show it to us.

And, finally, follow those better examples that the disciples gave later in their lives. After the resurrection Peter followed, and the other apostles followed, through danger and fear, trusting in the Lord they had once abandoned in fear and doubt.

God grant that we, who too often have followed the bad example, by God's grace follow the good. Be careful about making eloquent promises of lifelong faithfulness. Such pride went before the disciples' downfall in the Garden of Gethsemane. Instead pray that, for Jesus our Savior's sake, our heavenly Father might give us an ever greater measure of his Holy Spirit. May he increase our faith and, with it, our courage. "Lord God, when we face our crises in our Gethsemanes, help us to stand firm." Amen.

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