

Minor Festivals: St Mark, the Evangelist, April 25

The Deserter not Deserted

When Jesus' enemies arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane, all of our Lord's disciples deserted him and fled. "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." The evangelist Mark is the only one who records this incident. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that Mark was the one who followed Jesus as he was being led to the palace of the high priest, but fled without his clothes when Christ's enemies tried to nab him.

April 25 is the festival of St. Mark the Evangelist. The word "evangelist" means "gospel writer." The evangelist Mark wrote the fourth Gospel. But who was he? His full name was John Mark. His mother's name was Mary. She owned a house in Jerusalem where the believers in the early Christian church used to congregate. Mary's house very well could have been the house in which Jesus celebrated the last Passover and instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion.

About sixteen years after our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven the believers in Jerusalem and Judea were smitten by a severe famine. The church in Antioch of Syria gathered an offering to help their impoverished brothers and sisters in the faith. The apostle Paul and Barnabas carried their offering to Jerusalem. When they returned to Antioch, they took John Mark, who happened to be Barnabas' cousin, with them.

The Holy Spirit revealed to the congregation in Antioch that they were to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. They took John Mark with them as their helper. They sailed to Cyprus, where Mark watched as the Holy Spirit gathered believers in that place. From there they sailed to the city of Perga in Pamphylia, which was in southern Asia Minor. For one reason or another, there Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas. Perhaps he couldn't endure the rigors and difficulty of their journeys. Maybe he was afraid of the persecution that came along with being witnesses of Christ. For whatever reason, he abandoned Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem.

This caused the apostle Paul to lose his confidence in Mark. When it was time for Paul and Barnabas to go on their second missionary journey, Paul refused to take Mark along, although Barnabas wanted to. There was such a big disagreement that Paul took Silas and headed for Asia Minor, while Barnabas and Mark headed for Cyprus. The book of Acts tells us nothing more about these cousins.

But we do learn about them from other books in the New Testament. During Paul's first imprisonment between the years 61-63 AD, Mark was with Paul in Rome. It seems as if Paul was sending Mark to Asia Minor to do the Lord's work there (Colossians 4:10). Later on, when Paul was off on his fourth missionary journey, Mark was once again in Rome—this time with Peter. It was most likely at this time when Mark wrote his Gospel—the fourth book of the New Testament.

Later on, Paul was again imprisoned in Rome, while Mark was near Timothy who was serving the church in Ephesus of Asia Minor. Mark had regained Paul's confidence, for he wrote to Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Imagine the joy and comfort Mark received from those words. Mark very well could have been in Rome when, a short time later, Paul was executed.

On April 25, remember the evangelist Mark. Like Mark, you and I at times have been timid and not willing to move forward with God's work. We have been afraid of what the future holds. We may have even lost the confidence of others because we failed to follow through. But the Lord can still use weak, timid sinners like you and I, just as he used Mark. The Holy Spirit used Mark as his instrument to give us the history of Christ's perfect life of dedication to God and to all sinners, his innocent death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection from the dead. The message of forgiveness in Christ that comforted and restored Mark, is the same message that comforts and restores us. It assures us that although we have at times deserted Christ and his work, he will never desert us. Now, as forgiven sinners, we can, like Mark, live out our days diligently and faithfully serving our Savior.

After sharing this devotion with your family, take the time to read Acts 13:1-13, 15:36-41.

Pastor Zuberbier