

UNNAMED *but* UNFORGOTTEN

The man who ran away naked

Mark 14:48-52

With Jon 19/07/26

There is something about our privacy that we value deeply and our physical nudity is no exception. All of us tend to react to nudity. Whether that be attraction or shock or just being appalled! Gwen and I were on holiday in Menorca many years ago. We thought we would walk along the beach. I noticed in the corner of my eye someone wearing a skin-coloured bathing suit. Then another and another. Then Gwen realised we were on a

nudist beach! Well! We both turned red and looked down at our feet and hurried along! I think Mark includes this story because it sheds light on three of the most important relationships we have: our relationship with our God, our relationship with each other and our relationship with ourselves. Someone once asked Jesus, 'what is the greatest commandment' Jesus quoted 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' (Mk 12:29-31

Naked weakness Jesus was in Gethsemane praying in agony knowing what was to come. A young man wearing nothing but a loin cloth was also there. (This could have been Mark himself) Jesus is arrested and the disciples flee leaving Jesus to face the mob alone. The young man was seized by an armed guard who managed to grab the loin cloth and the lad legged it butt naked! In his lack of love for Jesus he failed to stand up for Jesus and the injustice. He does what any one of us would have done in that situation. It serves as a reminder of the problem we all have. We fail to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength! To try to make up for this weakness and inability to love God we turn to loving ourselves and to all kinds of things that we feel give us worth and value. We try to be a better person, to try harder, run faster, pass exams, "I'll be happy, once I get this job or this promotion" Others try to find it in family: the perfect husband, perfect wife, perfect children or perfect parents, perfect looking people, with perfect friends, having perfect fun all the time!! But what about church? "I'll work harder than everyone, be more faithful than everyone, work hard to make ourselves feel better and more acceptable to God". Another response is to give up! I'll never be good enough for God to love me. My life's a mess so I won't bother trying to be good! Whether we give up and live a messy life, or we try harder, both fail to love God. Isaiah 64:6 describes our best efforts, our so-called righteousness, as filthy rags. Mark tells us this little story to remind us of our naked weakness. Job 1 :21 says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return." We are weak because of sin. We can't love God, we love ourselves too much.

Naked Isolation. The naked guy did not hang around to stand up for Jesus. He ran away. They all left Jesus fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy, "strike the shepherd and the sheep are scattered" Without Jesus Christ, we are not able to love one another as God intends us to. There is a fundamental flaw in our ability to love one another perfectly. Right from the beginning Adam sins and blames God and Eve for his sin. Eve blames the serpent. In the next generation, Cain kills his brother Abel. The problem of loving your neighbour as yourself it everywhere! At its worst, human relationships descend into war. Church life is no exception! We're blessed to be a growing church, but more people bring different ways of looking at things! Go to any members meeting and you'll see that we find it really hard to love one another fully and completely all the time! We can be focused on only on catching up with our friends and missing someone sitting alone or not stopping to say a proper hello. The Bible calls us to love one another. Ezekiel 1 8:7 says "the righteous clothe the naked". Jesus goes further "I was naked and you clothed me" (Matt 25:36) When? Whenever you did for one of these brothers or sisters of mine you did for me"! James says, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." We can talk the talk, but we have to walk the walk. Mark is reminding us that we have a deep human flaw. We can't love one another as we ought.

Naked Shame. Genesis helps us understand the shame of our nakedness. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves to cover their shame. And we do exactly the same thing. We sew fig leaves to cover the imperfections of our lives presenting smiles when we should be shedding tears. We hold on to the fig leaf of a career, of perfect spouses, perfect families, perfect friends when no such things exist. But the problem is that these fig leaves don't last. We realise how weak and unable to love our God and our fellow human beings we really are. When the fig leaves are gone, we are left with shame. The Bible makes use of the imagery of nakedness to expose shame and guilt. "Egypt naked and barefoot": humiliation (Isaiah 20:2-4), "Nineveh's nakedness": judgement, (Nahum 3:5) "Jerusalem's nakedness and shame" in Lamentations, Hosea's wife Gomer who had been unfaithful to Hosea and was sold to slavery, naked in the slave market. Noah's drunken nakedness and one of his sons mocking him, the other two sons honouring him by covering him. (Gen 9) We can sometimes hide our sins from each other and sometimes from ourselves. But God sees the real us. He sees our thoughts, motivations, priorities and it is frightening because it can only lead us to shame. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Heb 4:13) Being exposed is terrifying because one day we will meet him who sees the real us. Jesus said that on the day when we stand before God "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover US!" (Luke 23:30) In short in our nakedness as human beings, our weakness, our failures, our sin, we need someone to cover us, to forgive us, to give us strength, to bring us together. We need someone to clothe us, to love us.

Answer. Mark doesn't stop at this little story. Jesus was crucified after being flogged and beaten and a crown of thorns pressed into his scalp. The most powerful being in existence chose to die in absolute weakness on a cross. The Shepherd was struck and the sheep scattered Suddenly cut off from the holy Trinity, he was left alone, crying out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?!" Soldiers cast lots for his clothes. But "who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame" (Heb 12:2.) So we can be blessed as the "one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Psalm 32:1) and "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal 3:27) Trust him, admit your sin and nakedness and let him forgive and clothe us with his righteousness. He clothes us with himself.

Implications: God said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Cor 12:9-10) The power that works in every Christian may not be what you thought. It may not be to fulfil your desires for power and money but it may be that the quiet person when asked what they believe can share something about Jesus dying for them personally. The messed-up person tells of how he's forgiven him. The bitter person is the first to forgive and reconcile. The proud person admits his or her moral failure and now boasts in Jesus. There is a power that he unleashes in us so that when we love and follow him it becomes unstoppable. He reverses the isolating effect and draws us together with love that covers a multitude of sins (Pet 4:8) You will clothe others with compassion. The Christian will never again be alone. The Christian church is the place where you will see people from all over the world, come together as one.

"I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain... They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe." (Rev 6:9.) "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes. "Psalm 113:7-8 Do you feel a sense of shame this morning, but you believe and love him? Then realise, " ...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9) Mark's challenge for us is to realise our naked weakness, isolation and shame, to admit to it and to turn to Jesus.

Close. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness" (Rev 3:17) For his glory. Amen.