

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM! **Forgive Our Fearful Lack Of Trust!**

(The Disciples in the Garden)
Mark 14:48-52

In Mark 14:48-52 we read about how the disciples fled from the Garden of Gethsemane, leaving Jesus alone with his captors and his betrayer.

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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

The disciples had said: *“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you”* (Mt 26:35). *“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will”* (Mt 26:33). *“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death”* (Lk 22:33). If ever words came back to haunt people, and haunt them quickly, these were the words. It had only been a few hours earlier that they had spoken them, in that warm, safe upper room in a house in Jerusalem. And now Jesus’ disciples were running in every direction, running for their lives, while the man they had promised to stand beside was bound and led away to judgment and death.

The sad fact about courage is that, all too often, you feel it most when you need it the least and feel it the least when you so desperately need it the most. Before the incident in Gethsemane, the disciples had known what they were supposed to do when the time came. Stand with Jesus! Never leave him or forsake him! But in that dark and shadowy garden, where God alone knew how many soldiers there were with torches and swords and clubs everywhere, the courage that the disciples had all so strongly felt in themselves at suppertime melted away.

And why did their courage flee? It was because they no longer trusted Jesus. This is the man who once walked across water to rescue them. This is the one who had rebuked a gale-force wind when it had frightened them. But now they were afraid that if they stayed with him, they would be doomed. Doom doesn’t threaten you and me too often. And yet, like the disciples on that sad Thursday night so long ago, there are times when you find yourself tempted to run away from situations where Christ, our Lord, wants you to take a stand. And, like the rest of us, you run away for the same reason as the disciples. That is when we must pray: Forgive Our Fearful Lack of Trust!

1. We abandon you when our faith is weakest.

The disciples never thought of themselves as cowards. They didn’t consider themselves to be braggarts or blowhards. They really loved Jesus. They really wanted to be his loyal followers. When they said

those things about staying with him through thick and thin, they meant every word!

But how soon the disciples' boasting changed to fear and flight! They stayed with Jesus long enough for the walk to the olive grove called Gethsemane. But once there, they fell asleep while Jesus prayed even though he had asked them to keep watch with him. Amazed and bewildered, they watched as Judas, one of their own group, betrayed Jesus to his enemies. Confused and frightened, they ran away to hide while their Lord was bound and led away to trial.

Jesus knew this was going to happen. Just hours earlier, he had reminded the disciples of a prophecy: "*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*" (Mk 14:27). As he told them clearly, one was going to betray him; another was going to deny him; all the others, as he put it, would "*fall away on account of me*" (Mt 26:31). None of them had believed these things would happen. All of them had protested, "Not me, Lord!". And now these things were coming horribly true.

It was their confusion that led them to abandon the trust they had once had in Jesus. Jesus had told them exactly what was going to happen in Jerusalem; he had been telling them for months. And he had taught them again and again what he was here to do: to give his life for the sins of all people. Yet somehow they still harbored ideas of an earthly king with worldly power and of glory. All the old legends and hopes about the coming earthly kingdom of the Messiah still rattled around in their heads.

When Jesus wouldn't lift a finger to stop the temple guards from arresting him, the disciples were beside themselves. What's Jesus doing? Why doesn't he fight? Why isn't he summoning 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 when their faith in him was shattered, they ran away in fear.

It is the same lack of trust that can cause you and me to abandon the Lord as well. Like the disciples, courage is easier to come up with when you don't really need it. What grand and successful struggles against temptation you can weave in your imagination! "Satan can tempt me, the sinful world can sing its siren song, but I know that I'll stand fast. I won't give in. I will fight the good fight of faith—I will!

And yet, when push comes to shove, all your resolve can fail in an instant. It's easy here, in church, to make the promises of everlasting loyalty to Christ. It is easy during your nighttime prayers in the solitude of your bedroom to pledge undying devotion to our Savior and our King. But get out from behind these walls; get out of your house; be forced to deal with that world of sin and temptation and see what happens!

And you know something? The fears we face are so much less than those of the disciples. They abandoned Jesus to save their lives. The stakes are never that high for you, are they?

"I know what they were doing was wrong, but I went along with everybody else so they wouldn't think I was a nerd;" the result: Jesus abandoned. "I kept my mouth shut when my brother-in-law started to talk religion because I didn't want to cause a scene;" the result: Jesus undefended. "It looked like fun and I didn't want to miss out on something enjoyable so I went along;" the result: Jesus' Word unheeded. "I know the Bible says one thing but my teacher says that's outdated thinking. I don't want

him to think less of me or give me a bad grade;" the result: Jesus' Word despised. "No, I didn't ask the new guy if he had a church home here in Tucson. He might think I'm a religious nut;" the result: the spread of Jesus' kingdom hindered. "Of course I know that lifestyle is contrary to God's Word. But if I said something they'd think I was judgmental;" the result: Jesus' Word ignored. "I know what I believe, but I don't want to push my beliefs on someone else...besides, they might laugh at me;" the result: Jesus' Words forsaken.

Sometimes...oftentimes the price of loyalty to Jesus is just something we're not ready to pay, and so we fail him. It is a lack of trust that leads to foolish fear and failure. "It doesn't look like Jesus is leading me to a place that is safe and good...I think he's taken a wrong turn. I don't want to go there. I don't think he know's what he's doing."

And so foolish fears that often hardly merit a shiver can cause your trust in him to melt away, and with it goes all your resolve to be his true and obedient follower. Foolish fears cause you to abandon him and run, just like the disciples did.

2. Father, increase my faith.

And that is why every Christian, every day, needs to pray these words: "Father, increase my faith!" When trust in your Savior is at its lowest ebb, that's when your prayers need to rise to their highest fervor. God forbid you should run away from him because your faith has grown weak! He's certainly done nothing to deserve such lack of confidence.

In order to combat foolish fears, we need to pray, "Lord Jesus, teach me once again the wisdom of your commandments and your leadership." The ten commandments not only tell you what God's will is for your life, they not only delineate God's standard of conduct, i.e., what God says is right and what God says is wrong, they also provide you with a way to show your love and thankfulness to God. When you study his commandments you will see the wisdom and insight of him who wrote them; that they are not a straightjacket to keep you from having fun. You may even come to the point where you realize that there are blessings, not sacrifices but blessings right here in this life for those who live their lives according to his commands. When you study and think through the ways he would have you go, how quickly you could put to rest your foolish fears! He knows what he is doing. Our Creator certainly knows the best paths on which to lead us. We truly have nothing to fear. We should always be able to say with the psalmist, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me*" (Ps 23:4).

Foolish fears...that is why it is important to study the stories in the Bible. There you can 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*" (Ro 8:28). Read again and again the examples of how faith in God's guidance has never been a mistake. Remember Moses and the people of Israel—seemingly trapped between the Egyptians and the Red Sea, murmuring about the hopeless place to which they had been led—until Moses told them, "*Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today*" (Ex 14:13). Remember the calming voice of the Savior as he walked through the raging Sea of Galilee and told his disciples, "*It is I; don't be afraid*" (Jn 6:20). He has never let down anyone who has faith in him. Romans 9:33 "*The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.*"

Fighting foolish fears, that is why it is important to remain constant in God's Word and faithful to the sacraments. These are the means by which he increases your faith and, consequently, decreases your fears. Do you fear sometimes that God may 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 this child; 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.

The Christian life is not a cakewalk; God has made it abundantly clear that troubles will sometimes come upon you even if you follow his guidance. 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 you into any place where his Son has not already been and has not already conquered all that you might fear.

Freed from foolish fears and cleansed from guilt by his blood, you can dedicate yourself, body and soul, to living out the trust that he so rightly has earned from you. Don't ever fear that he doesn't know what is best for you. Rely on Jesus to know and to show you the best path for your life.

And, finally, follow the disciples. Follow the better examples that the disciples gave later in their lives. They became bold, courageous messengers of the Gospel. They risked all, even death, to proclaim the risen Savior. They followed Jesus' guidance through danger and fear, but this time unafraid, trusting in the Lord they had once abandoned in fear and doubt.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

Forgive our fearful lack of trust that leads us so often to deny you, do the opposite of what you command, and run away from the very opportunities you give us to stand up for you. Gracious God and Lord, give us an ever greater measure of the Holy Spirit. May he increase our faith and, with it, our courage. Help us to stand firmly with you and in complete accord with your will. Amen.