

I Wanna Be Like Mark

An iconic 1992 Gatorade commercial had a song titled, “Be Like Mike”, but the refrain, “I wanna be like Mike” was the hook. Michael Jordan was at the zenith of his career and who *didn't* want to be like Mike? Well, on the Festival of St. Mark, who *does* want to be like Mark?

There is much to commend him. Tradition has it that the house where the church was gathered during the imprisonment of Peter in Acts 12 is also the location of the upper room of the Last Supper in Mark 14 and of the first large church assembly mentioned in Acts 1. Acts 12:12 says that once released Peter “went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.” Mark seems to come from a wealthy family. This has led to him being identified as the rich young man who went away from Jesus in gloom because he loved his riches more. What seals the deal for many that this young man was Mark is that only his Gospel says, “Jesus looked at him and loved him” (Mk 10:21). Who but Jesus or the one being loved by Him could know this?

If you have a house capable of holding about 120 people as Acts 1:15 says, you have a big house and probably have money. The fact that the church is first assembled there means it's the first house church and the owner is in it. Read Acts 16. See how fervently Lydia begs, demands Paul make her house a house-church. Read 1 Cor. 1. See that that not many wealthy people were in the early church. Mark's family was. This is remarkable. And we find Mark at Antioch having been brought there by his cousin Barnabas. Mark even goes with Paul on his first missionary trip. This means he was in the midst of the first ministry to non-Jews which was controversial and difficult. It means he was at the place where Jesus' followers were first, derisively, called ‘Christians’ (Acts 11:26). “Christ, Christ, Christ” everything always came back to the Person and Work of Christ, so they were called ‘Christians.’ And Mark was here for all of it. This is of God's grace; who wouldn't want to be like Mark?

Not so fast. Mark fails the trustworthiness test. There's a website where you type a name, and it comes back with accurate info about the person and a trustworthiness rating. I was a 4.6 out of 5. Mark, based on some things we know and some things we surmise is at best a 1.6. Yes, Mark went on the 1st missionary journey with Paul and Cousin Barnabas but turned tail and ran after the first stop. Luther Reed, a mid-20th century liturgy scholar, says the Anglican 1662 Collect for St. Mark contains “what seems a disparaging reference to his desertion of Paul” (*Liturgy*, 558). How would you like to be remembered 1,600 years later as a deserter?

You wanna be like Mark? You want to be the occasion of one of the biggest riffs in church history? Let's hear it in the Holy Spirit's own words: “Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached...and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take... Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.” Catch that? Barnabas and Mark sailed for Cyprus, but Paul and Silas left commended by the brothers to God's grace? You know whom they sided with. You want the church of the first century siding against you? Then you don't want to be like Mark.

Now we come to our controversial text. Only Mark records the young man fleeing from Dark Gethsemane naked into the night. As John refers to himself in his Gospel as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” could this incident be Mark's signature? Well, the word for linen garment is only used by Mark here, and along with Matthew and Luke, he uses it one other place. The word is for a very fine and costly cloth such as a rich young man might have. Who would be in Gethsemane on this dark night other than the disciples who accompanied Jesus, Judas “who knew the place” (Jn 18:2), and someone whose home was the location of the upper room and was following Jesus from there? However, the “was following” could mean he was already a disciple. Well, that ended in Gethsemane. He had more fear of being caught with Jesus than being found naked. He'd rather be a coward than a Christian. Still want to be like Mark?

Yes. Mark is hope for all those who stand naked and judged. He's hope for all of us who follow only to fall away. Let's say he was the rich young man in Mark 10 who went away gloomy from Jesus because he'd rather have riches now than salvation forever. Well, he comes around to following Jesus maybe on of Palm Sunday. He hears all that goes on in the upper room. The squabbling about which disciple is greater; the warning that one of them will betray Him; their certainty that it's not me. The sudden departure of Judas. The amazing words of Jesus, “Take eat; take drink. This is my Body given over to death for you. This is My blood shed on behalf of

you.” Jesus’ loving prayer for His followers, and then he follows to Gethsemane. He witnesses the agony. The great drops of blood falling to the ground as Jesus prays in desperation for the cup of God’s wrath to pass Him by but concludes by saying His Father’s will be done. Then comes the angel to strengthen him. Then suddenly there is Judas and the mob, the high priest’s ear is cut off but healed by Jesus. His moment to confess comes and he flees naked before the mob and God.

But what’s this? Paul writing from prison to the Colossians says, “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.” This isn’t a Hallmark card; this is Holy Scripture. This greeting form is found in Romans 16. It means Mark is in fellowship with the Colossians. Furthermore, they are to “receive him.” Read 2 John 10, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house.” By commanding the Colossians to receive Mark, Paul is recognizing his apostolic ministry. And note how specific Paul is. The Mark he is talking about is the cousin of Barnabas. The one who turned tail and run after one missionary stop. The one who occasioned a big, unseemly apostolic fight. Yeah this is the one you are to commune with and whom you are to receive as a pastor. Yike, could there be forgiveness that big, that complete, that gracious? Well, if Mark has that, I wanna be like Mark.

We’re not done yet. Paul on his deathbed again writes from prison. This time from Rome where he will die, mentions Mark. 2 Timothy is where Paul says, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure” (4:6). 5 verses later Paul says, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (4:11). Wow! It’s been about 35 years since the rich young man turned gloomily and greedily away from the saving Jesus and then back to Him in Jerusalem and away again in Gethsemane. It’s been about 20 years since Mark went boldly to where Christians were first named and out on the 1st missionary journey only to cowardly flee after one stop. 20 years since Paul wanted nothing more to do with that coward. But now: Make sure you get Mark and bring him to me. He is helpful, useful in ministry. O come on? How can this be? Mark walks in the steps of Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul. They followed and fell and followed again. Well if those are the steps of Mark, I wanna be like him.

Back to the “linen garment”. I told you only Mark uses this word to describe the young man’s garment. He also uses it, along with Matthew and Luke, for the cloth that the dead Jesus is wrapped in for burial. That empty grave cloth proves Jesus is risen and therefore, God has put away His wrath against sins and sinners for Jesus’ sake. If you were there in Gethsemane, having seen the agony, having seen the betraying Judas and the fleeing disciples, and when your moment of confession came you fled too, I think that would stick with you. I think if you had followed with Jesus right till this point, it would bother you that when it really mattered, you failed. Like Peter’s roster, charcoal, and dunks in the sea, that linen garment you left behind would condemn you as a coward. See John 21 for how Jesus redeems the charcoal smell and the dunking for Peter. See Mark for how the linen garment does this for him. Jesus too left it behind not as proof of Him being a coward but as proof that He is risen: Sin, Death, and Devil are defeated even those, especially those, of a cowardly young man like Mark!

See the bulletin cover. It’s a takeoff from the statue on the cathedral of St. Mark. Mark’s symbol is that of a winged lion since Epiphanius, 4th century. The Latin words *Pax Tibi Marce* are only part of the inscription on the book held by the lion. The actual statue has "*Pax tibi Marce, evangelista meus. Hic requiescet corpus tuum*" which translated is "Peace be with thee, O Mark, my evangelist. Here thy body will rest." Venetian tradition, not church history, has these words spoken by an angel to the travelling Mark. In later depictions, it’s often just the words, “Peace be with thee Mark.”

Well then, I wanna be like Mark. I want to have Mark’s peace of my sins being so thoroughly forgiven that I can be in fellowship with the Colossians and wanted by the dying St. Paul because though a sinner still, I can be useful. I wanna be like Mark. Though the linen garment I left behind is proof of my sin and sinfulness, the garment Jesus left behind is proof that these have been forgiven and God is at peace with me. And no angel tells me I can rest in peace. Jesus Himself does in every Votum, Dismissal, and Benediction. Hey, Mark probably wants to be like me. Amen

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