

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MARK
APRIL 25, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA



PRELUDE *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* Setting: Michael D Costello

WELCOME

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ENTRANCE HYMN #709 *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

**1 The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.**

**2 Where streams of living water flow,
My ransomed soul He leadeth
And, where the verdant pastures grow,
With food celestial feedeth.**

**3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love He sought me
And on His shoulder gently laid
And home rejoicing brought me.**

**4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me,
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.**

**5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
Thine unction grace bestoweth;
And, oh, what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth!**

**6 And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house forever!**

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come into the Lord's presence on this day, it is right for us to examine our lives in light of the will of God, to confess our sins, and to ask for God's forgiveness. We do this in the sure and certain hope that God will keep His promise and give us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Let us then take time to recall the ways we have failed to uphold God's Law this week and confess these sins to Him.

(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)

Most merciful God,

We confess our inability to be faithful in our promises to you and to walk in the way of Christ. We have neglected to serve others and have sought our own well-being rather than good for all. Acknowledging our sin, we look to you for mercy and healing. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, and guide us in the path of humble service. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

THIS IS THE FEAST

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Power, riches, wisdom and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation.

Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty God,

You have enriched Your Church with the proclamation of the Gospel through the evangelist Mark. Grant that we may firmly believe these glad tidings and daily walk according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 146

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
When his breath departs he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 2 Timothy 4:5-18

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL Mark 16:14-20

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 16th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

Afterward [Jesus] appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw

him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

As you might imagine, I found particular joy this week in preparing the sermon for this festival day. I am named for St. Mark the Evangelist and I can't help but feel a special connection to this particular Gospel account.

While doing my study, I decided that I would also look at hymn stanzas to see if St. Mark or his Gospel might have been given any particular mention. I quickly thought of that great hymn *By All Your Saints in Warfare* and was delighted to see that there was in fact a stanza dedicated to this saint. I went ahead and chose it as our Hymn of the Day.

However, as I began to read the stanza, I immediately felt some discomfort with its message. And I even started to question it. Not that there was anything wrong with the message itself. But I wondered why it was chosen as a message connected to St. Mark.

The stanza says: “For Mark, O Lord, we praise You, the weak by grace made strong, whose labors and whose Gospel enrich our triumph song. May we, in all our weakness, reflect your servant life and follow in your footsteps, enduring cross and strife.”

What is it about Mark, I wondered, that caused this hymn writer to address the subject of weakness?

I will admit right away that some of my wonder was no doubt caused by one of my own insecurities. I am not a physically strong man. I am thin. Always have been. I avoided sports like football and wrestling. My weight-lifting sessions take about five minutes. I have trouble opening jars with tight lids. The last time I bought a suit the salesman said: “you are a thin man.” Weakness has always been a little issue for me. Even the meaning of my name makes me think of this. “Mark” is derived from the Roman god Mars and means “strong defender.” I try.

But beyond the nerve that was touched there, I also know a lot about scripture, and I found the wording of the hymn stanza to be... curious. St. Paul was the one who claimed his strength was made perfect in weakness, not Mark. And there's only one use of the word “weak” in the whole Gospel. That's where Jesus says: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” – a quote also found in Matthew, and a quote that pertains to everyone. What is it about Mark and his Gospel that conjured up the thought of weakness for this hymn writer?

I suppose the answer to the mystery might be as simple as the fact that of the four Gospel accounts, Mark is the shortest. Some might see that as a weakness in comparison to the others.

And, along those same lines, some scholars have claimed that Mark's is the least literary of the four – exhibiting a simplicity that doesn't stand up to the others in style and presentation.

And yet, contemporary commentator James Voelz shows that this Gospel is in fact quite literary. The work obviously pays close attention to the grammar, syntax and vocabulary that it uses. What's more, Mark's presentation is now said to be quite in line with the expectations and preferences of its Roman audience. Its first hearers would have been very pleased with the Gospel's emphasis on action, its short and succinct narrations and its explanations of Jewish details that would have been unclear to a Gentile audience.

The early church decided that the image it would assign to this Gospel was that of a lion. We have that very symbol of the Gospel right here in our sanctuary's stained-glass window. Mark's Gospel may be short, but it is also powerful.

Speaking of those first Christians in Rome, they would have felt very weak compared to the power and glory of that great state, whose seat of power was right there next to them and who rejected them as scapegoats for their tragedies and losses. And yet, taught by leaders such as Peter and edified by the efforts of people such as Mark, who captured Peter's teachings in his Gospel, the people became strong in spirit and thrived to the point that they would soon transform that town into a place that would reach the world with the Gospel. From weakness to strength – we see it in the history.

Maybe the hymn stanza reflects that history. I don't know. Then again, maybe it reflects certain other traditions about the Gospel.

One of the more bizarre of these traditions regards the way in which Mark may have included himself in his Gospel account. It is sometimes said that each of the Gospel writers includes something in the text which inserts them into the story. Matthew wrote about his own calling. Luke mentions that he was writing to Theophilus. John refers to himself as the "one Jesus loved." What does Mark do?

According to the tradition, Mark is to be identified as the young man who followed Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. As the story goes, when the soldiers arresting Jesus seized this young man, he got away by leaving the linen cloth and running away naked. A strange episode indeed – and seemingly random. Unless it was included for some cryptic reason – like a reference to the Gospel's author.

The episode certainly does speak to a kind of weakness. But could it be inspiration for a whole hymn stanza? Probably not.

Perhaps the hymn writer was thinking instead of the beautiful description Jesus gives of himself in Mark 10:48. There Jesus says: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." These words are certainly referenced in that stanza. Still, they don't reflect anything specific about Mark. And Matthew includes these great words from Jesus too.

It seems that perhaps we have to go outside the Gospel itself for an explanation. The Book of Acts tells us about a man named John who was also called Mark. We refer to him as John Mark. The majority of the Christian tradition has identified this John Mark as the same Mark who wrote the Gospel and who appears also in three letters of Paul and one letter of Peter (who, by the way, calls Mark "my son"). But as Dr. Voelz reminds us in his commentary, we just can't be certain about this.

That being said, one of the teachings about John Mark in the Book of Acts could possibly be labeled an act of weakness. According to Acts 13, while travelling with Paul on a missionary journey, John Mark decided to leave and go back to Jerusalem. No explanation is given for why he left. However, two chapters later, when Paul and Barnabas talk about their next steps in mission, the subject of John Mark's leaving comes up. While Barnabas wants to take him along on their next journey, Paul strongly

objects, saying he didn't want to take "one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work."

Paul, it seems, identified John Mark's withdrawal as an act of weakness. And perhaps it was. But was it an act of spiritual weakness? Or was it just physical? Was it a sign of ongoing weakness? Or was it just one incident? Barnabas had no problem with John Mark. What's more, the Christian tradition has had no problem with him either. According to tradition, Mark eventually moved to Alexandria in Egypt and established the Christian church there amidst strong opposition. After ministering there for a short time, Mark was martyred for the faith. Today he is known as the father of the Coptic Church and founder of Christianity for the whole African continent. Weakness turned to strength? Perhaps.

Let me add one more thought on why our hymn writer may have decided to dedicate his stanza on St. Mark to the topic of weakness turned to strength. Our epistle letter today was one of those mentions of Mark by St. Paul. Here, in his writing to Timothy, Paul tells Timothy: "Get Mark and bring him with you." Paul wants to see Mark. If this is the same John Mark, it seems that all is forgiven. Paul, as we heard, is definitely writing here later in his ministry.

Still, even though Mark is wanted, notice why he is wanted. Paul says: "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in ministry."

Useful. I don't know about you, but I don't find that word to be such a great compliment. Tools are useful. So are all kinds of other plain, ordinary things. When people evaluate me as a person or describe the work I do, I don't necessarily want them to say, "oh, he is useful." I guess it's better than useless. But still, I'd prefer to be seen as offering something a little more unique and valuable.

And yet, Paul, in his two other usages of the word (the only other usages in the New Testament by the way) uses it in a very complimentary way. In his letter to Philemon, Paul builds up Philemon's servant Onesimus with that word – urging Philemon to accept him as a brother by describing how useful he has been to him in his work. And, in Second Timothy 2 (v.20-21), just two chapters prior to his call out for Mark in chapter four, Paul not only mentions but also illustrates the value of a person being useful to the Lord. He says: "Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

We may feel like we want to be unique and special – gold and silver rather than wood or clay. But God encourages us to find joy and satisfaction in being useful. Let us be useful to God... for God is the one who will use our good works to bring honor and blessing – to us and to others.

I'm wondering if our hymn writer thought about this last description of Mark and his usefulness. And, I'm wondering, too, if he perhaps thought of it in light of his own family story. Horatio Bolton Nelson was a namesake, and the son of a nephew, of the great Admiral Horatio Viscount Nelson – one of England's most celebrated heroes. Admiral Nelson's life was pretty low after England's defeat in the American Revolution, filled for years with illness and unemployment. But when the French and Spanish threatened, and Nelson was called back into service, he saved his country by standing strong at the Battle of Trafalgar, during which he was also mortally wounded. Nelson's words that day, just prior to the commencement of the battle, are known by all in that country and continue to inspire: "England expects that every man will do his duty."

St. Mark, in the concluding words of his Gospel, records how Jesus calls us to a certain duty. Jesus calls us to the duty of proclaiming the Gospel. "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation," he said.

Interestingly, Mark had begun his writing by saying: “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Now here, at the end of his presentation on the life and ministry of Jesus, he doesn’t say that the Gospel ends. Because it doesn’t. The Good News of Christ’s salvation continues. It continues as God’s people proclaim it.

Where the Gospel is proclaimed, shame-filled and broken souls are healed by the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. Where the Gospel is proclaimed, hearts are lifted up with the message of resurrection victory over sin and death. Where the Gospel is proclaimed, people find the power to extend love and forgiveness to others. Where the Gospel is proclaimed, the weak become strong, the strong learn the power of weakness, and the strong and weak live together in harmony.

Following St. Mark, let us proclaim the Gospel in all that we say and do. Let us make it our duty. Let us find it both a useful and joyful task. And most of all, let us also hear its message ourselves – so that we are reminded each day that our sins are forgiven in Christ and we rest secure in the arms of the Almighty God.

In the holy name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #518 By All Your Saint in Warfare

**1 By all Your saints in warfare,
For all Your saints at rest,
Your holy name, O Jesus,
Forevermore be blest!
For You have won the battle
That they might wear the crown;
And now they shine in glory
Reflected from Your throne.**

**15 For Mark, O Lord, we praise You,
The weak by grace made strong,
Whose labors and whose Gospel
Enrich our triumph song.
May we, in all our weakness,
Reflect Your servant life
And follow in Your footsteps,
Enduring cross and strife.**

**3 Then let us praise the Father
And worship God the Son
And sing to God the Spirit,
Eternal Three in One,
Till all the ransomed number
Fall down before the throne,
Ascribing pow’r and glory
And praise to God alone.**

APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING Pastorale Setting: Johan Sebastian Bach

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Good Shepherd who ever seeks His sheep to gather them into one flock, would keep us always in His fold and guard us from every evil, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church, the flock of God, that as the glorious tidings of Jesus' life, death and resurrection were proclaimed by God's chosen one, St. Mark, we would boldly confess, proclaim and baptize; and that we always rejoice that "we who believe and are baptized, shall be saved," let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That Christian brothers love one another, more and more, especially in our own families and communities, and that we show our love for God in word and deed, and be the salt of the earth He called us to be, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the gift of good government, that as the Paschal Lamb has made peace between man and God, so He would grant peace and good days also to our beloved land, and between the nations of the world; and that God would shield those most at risk in keeping peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

In thanksgiving for our risen Christ, the firstborn from the dead, that He would bless those who suffer and those we remember, especially _____; and that He preserve them to eternal life, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we rejoice in the glorious Gospel You have breathed into Your people by the inspiration of the Holy Evangelists and Apostles, especially St. Mark, and we pray that through the shepherding of Your Holy Church, You would continue to gather into Your arms every scattered lamb, and bring us, with all your saints, to that heavenly banquet where we will feast forever; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #666 O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe

**1 O little flock, fear not the foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow;
Dread not his rage and pow'r.
And though your courage sometimes faints,
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour.**

**2 Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs;
Leave it to Him, our Lord.
Though hidden yet from mortal eyes,
His Gideon shall for you arise,
Uphold you and His Word.**

**3 As true as God's own Word is true,
Not earth nor hell's satanic crew
Against us shall prevail.
Their might? A joke, a mere facade!
God is with us and we with God—
Our vict'ry cannot fail.**

**4 Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer;
Great Captain, now Thine arm make bare,
Fight for us once again!
So shall Thy saints and martyrs raise
A mighty chorus to Thy praise
Forevermore. Amen.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe Setting: Kenneth T. Kosche

ALTAR FLOWERS: By Jennifer Z.

Acknowledgments

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