

Scripture: Mark 14:51-52

Sermon: "To Follow and to Run Away"

Text: Mark 14:5a and 52b---"and a young man followed him.....and ran away..."

Proposition: To follow Jesus and other leaders, but under stress to run a way from or desert them, are natural actions; but stronger and more solid Christian personality can develop as you experience forgiveness, so that you can have a genuine rebirth and renewal of faith.

Dates Written: July 30-Aug.1,1973

Dates and places used:

Aug. 19, 1973 - 324 Gen Hosp, USAR, MIAMI  
Franklin Blvd U.M. Church, Fla.

Don't forget Mark 14:52-53

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Text: Mark 14:52 and 53b--"and as you followed him... and ran away..."

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Places and places used:

St. Paul's Church, New York City  
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Introduction:

1. A man was to travel to California on business. He and his wife agreed that their three-year-old son would travel in the commercial plane with them to visit his grandparents while the couple attended the convention nearby. They boarded the big 747 jet for the little boy's first plane ride. His excitement turned to apprehension as the big plane gathered speed going down the runway. By the time they were airborne the lad was pale and clung to his father's right hand with both of his. "Why do we keep going up?" he wailed.

The father launched into a lengthy explanation of how the pilot had to make the plane climb for several miles. "Okay, now?" the Dad asked, at the end of his explanation.

"Okay, Dad," quavered the little boy. "It's just that it sure would be embarrassin' if we bumped into God with this big plane."

(B.R.Green, in Healthways, 4-73)

2. Our Scripture is about a fellow who did "bump into God," and for whom it was embarrassing.

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with this big plane."  
(F. B. Green, in Halfway, A-73)

Our excitement is about a fellow  
who said "Jump into God," and for whom  
it was embarrassing.



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I. Circumstances of this Scriptural incident can perhaps be suggested by another little story from the world of aviation.

1. An airline had been forced to cancel a flight. Its customer relations officer sought to learn what arrangements had been made for the people who were inconvenienced. He called an agent at the airport and asked, "What was the disposition of the passengers?"

After some hesitation, she replied, "Well, most of them were pretty unhappy."

(Quote, 7/22/73, p. 91)

2. Most of the people were unhappy who were involved in the incidents of the evening described in our immediate Scripture and the events leading up to it.

a. Jesus was troubled and unhappy after the Last Supper, so he went to Gethsemane's garden to think and pray.

b. Peter was unhappy because Jesus predicted that he, Peter, would betray Jesus before day break.

c. Jesus was unhappy that Peter, James and John could not stay awake

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"After some hesitation," she replied, "well, most of them were pretty unhappy."

3. Most of the people were unhappy who were involved in the incident of the airline. He described his own immediate reaction and the vents feeding us to

4. Jesus was troubled and unhappy after the last Supper, so he went to Gethsemane's garden to pray and cry.

5. Peter was unhappy because Jesus predicted that he, Peter, would betray Jesus before day break. 6. Jesus was unhappy that Peter, James and John could not stay awake



and watch while he went further into the garden for his meditation and prayer.

d. Peter, James and John were unhappy when Jesus on three separate occasions in the garden caught them asleep there and rebuked them for it.

e. The young man who followed Jesus and later ran away was unhappy when the attempt was made to seize him.

3. Many Bible scholars think that the young man who ran away naked was Mark, the writer of this Gospel.

a. They point out that this event is in no other of the gospels, and has little place in this one unless it is sort of like an artist's signature in the corner of a painting.

b. They say that there is no good reason for this incident to have been recorded unless it was based on personal reminiscensing of the author.

4. Other scholars think that there is little evidence that Mark was the young man about whom he wrote here.

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a. They point to a historian, Papias, who lived shortly after early Christian times, who wrote that Mark "neither heard the Lord nor followed him."

b. They say that this account was included to make even stronger the case for Jesus being the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament prophecy. For instance, Amos (2:16) speaking of one who shall be present when the Messiah comes, said: "...he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day."

5. It may be interesting to speculate as to who the young man was, but his identity neither makes nor breaks the meaning of the incident, as I see it. The message for us from this Scripture is suggested in the topic of this sermon: "To Follow, and to Run Away." The first part of that topic can lead us to speculate on

II. Reasons people follow others, and why they follow Jesus. There are many such reasons, but we will limit ourselves to four, not in order of importance, necessarily.

1. The first reason people

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1. The first reason people



1. The first reason is that people are curious about leaders.

a. A fellow called up a friend one morning and asked, "Did my friend Timothy come to your party last night, uninvited?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Oh," said the fellow, "the curse of drink. I heard that he beat up some of your guests. Is that right?"

"Yes, he punched a few."

"Oh, what liquor will do to a man. One more question -- was I there?"

(1 Harry Hershfield, in Parade, 6-3-73)

Besides being inconsistent in his attitude toward liquor, in that he condemned it but inadvertently admitted to using it to excess, this fellow had a natural curiosity about that which affected his friends.

b. Maybe the young man of our Scriptural incident was just curious about Jesus.

c. In our day it is almost popular to want to understand the religions and organizations of others. Curiosity along these lines leads to intelligent thinking.

d. To arouse such curiosity is a goal of evangelistic religious leaders, of those who would like to

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winwin others to their faith.

2. The gain of wealth and power, ~~for~~ the hope therefor, is a second reason for following a leader.

a. Hitler in his day in Germany was followed by many because he promised to revive the collapsed German national economy. He offered the cheap automobile that everyone could have. He proposed to and did for a while restore Germany as a world power. Many of those who followed him found power and wealth as their reward.

b. When you or I go job seeking, usually one of these two things is the prime thing for which we look in the employment. We want to be well paid, or we want to feel that we have some influence or power over others. We want at least to feel useful, one way or another, and the leader, the employer, who offers us the most satisfaction in these areas is the one who gets our services.

c. If power, positions of influence which are either actual or advisory may be sought from the leader. Many of the people involved closely in the present Watergate scandal need money less than they

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wanted power, it seems to many of us

d. At the point in Jesus' life which is narrated in our Scripture, gain was not something that the young man who followed Jesus could expect. Judas was the only one who got any financial gain out of the transaction that day, because he was paid to identify Jesus to the crowd who would seize the leader.

3. Charisma, or irresistible personal magnetism, is another reason people follow a leader.

a. A fire chief in Minnesota married a woman whose job was that of fire department dispatcher. Noticing that she soon had taken another job, someone inquired. "I won't have any wife of mine telling me where to go and how to get there," the chief replied.

b. To be a leader with charisma is to be able to get people to follow him and his directions. Charisma, by definition, is "a quality of extraordinary spiritual power attributed to a person or office capable of eliciting popular support in the direction of human affairs."

(Webster's Collegiate, 1960)





c. By that definition, Jesus had and has charisma. The charismatic person either strongly attracts or strongly repels other people.

4. Idealism is our fourth reason that people follow leaders. Idealism is the holding of ideals. We define an "ideal" as a mental image which serves as a pattern; or as the original ideal for a model or type (Ibid.) Idealists are people with ideals, and their holding of ideals is called idealism

a. Whatever the ideals may be, we do turn to leaders who seem to offer hope of achievement of them. That is why Franklin Delano Roosevelt held such appeal for so many people for so long in this country: they saw in him and his proposals and efforts some real hope and chance to realize their ideas. His four freedoms expressed their idealism well.

b. Those who followed Jesus to learn more about good interpersonal relationships were idealists. They had idealism, hope for better ways of getting along together, and Jesus seemed to offer the pattern for more detailed ways of fulfillment of the dream.

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5. People follow other people for these four reasons, for curiosity, for gain of wealth or power, for the charisma of the leader, and for the realization of their ideals. But people also are fickle at times, and run quickly away from a popular leader. What are

III. Reasons people desert their leaders, including Jesus? We limit ourselves here to three reasons, though undoubtedly there are more, these are prime reasons why positions of strong leadership are difficult to maintain.

1. Unfulfilled expectations is high on this list.

a. Castro's Cuba is a case in point. Not widespread affluence, but increasing hunger and deprivations have been the lot of his followers. This has been true in many other Communist and Socialist countries too.

b. There is presently growing disillusionment with President Nixon, because of Watergate and other matters; and this less than a year after he achieved one of the greatest political victories in the history of our country.

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c. In the religious field people turn from old leaders sometimes because these leaders turn out to be human, or perhaps even Elmer Gantry types of hypocrits. Their expectations are unfulfilled.

d. Unfulfilled expectations in relationship to social ills which are not solved as well and as quickly as expected contribute to people leaving old leadership.

e. In Jesus' case, his failure to lead in overthrowing Roman power and to establish the long-predicted powerful Jewish state was instrumental in the turning away from him. His disregard of traditional religious and social customs in favor of compassionate action on a one-to-one basis, on an unpretentious level, contributed to people turning from him too. He just was not what they expected of a Messiah.

2. People turn from old leaders because newer leaders come along who seem to have greater charisma.

a. They don't necessarily turn against the old leaders to hurt them, as seemed to happen to Jesus. It's just that somebody else comes along who seems more capable.

c. In the religious field people turn from old leaders sometimes because these leaders turn out to be human, or perhaps even bitter critics of hypocrites. Their expectations are unfulfilled.

d. Unfulfilled expectations in relationship to social life which are not solved as well and as quickly as expected contribute to people leaving old leadership.

e. In Jesus' case, his failure to lead in overthrowing Roman power and to establish the long-expected lower Jewish state was influential in the turning away from him. His disregard of traditional religious and social customs in favor of cooperation with a one-to-one basis, or an unrestricted love continued to people turning from him too. He just was not what they expected of a Messiah.

f. People turn from old leaders because newer leaders come along who seem to have greater charisma.

g. There isn't necessarily anything about the old leaders to hurt them, as seemed to happen to Jesus. It's just that a new, effective comes along who seems more capable.



B. One reason such a turnover takes place among the ministers in churches is perhaps because people seek a man who can do their religious duties for them, or who can get them to think that ~~they~~'re doing them real well even if they're not. The desire for ministerial turnover, for change of preachers, is illustrated in a bulletin of St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Ga., recently. This article was written as if it were a chain letter. It reads:

"This chain letter is meant to bring happiness to you. Unlike other chain letters it does not cost money. Just send a copy of this letter to six other churches which are tired of their ministers. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the bottom of the list. In one week you will receive 16,436 ministers, and one of them should be a dandy! Have faith in this letter. P.S.: One man broke the chain and got his old minister back."

(Quote, 7-22-73, p.91)

c. The people who turned away from Jesus, did not find another leader with greater charisma. Later

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many of them returned to him. The writer of Mark, the oldest Christian gospel, possibly was one of them.

3. Another reason people desert leadership is because of a natural instability in humans, a lack of the ability to endure, to last long at very much. When the leader begins to put unpleasant requirements upon them, however necessary, they grumble and begin looking for a more pleasant leader. It is hard to follow when it hurts to do so!

Conclusion: Let us try now to bring this all together. We have thought about why people follow leaders, only later to run away. We see that

1. We have our moments of inspiration. For Christians these come about mainly through Jesus Christ, to whom we commit ourselves, so that we do follow him as best we can.

2. However, as weak and fallible humans, we experience events and times in which we do "run away" from our leaders and from Jesus, thereby leaving ourselves exposed and "naked," as it were.

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3. As with Peter, later as with Paul, and with a host of others who have experienced the Christian struggle, ~~Chhristians~~ Christians today can know forgiveness for their running away. Then they can engage in much more effective living.

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