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KINDRED SPIRIT

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Dr. Mark L. Bailey

Getting a Handle on God's Love



The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:9). Thirty-six years ago, these words became a handle for me to grip—a truth to which I still cling. It has sustained me through decades of trials. Star Wars with Dolby stereo had just hit the cinemas; Steve Jobs had just introduced the Apple II computer; but—more important to us—my wife, Barby, was in her seventh month of pregnancy. We were thrilled to be expecting our first child.

But eight weeks before she was due, she developed toxemic poisoning. On a Friday in February her condition deteriorated to the extent that it required an emergency Caesarian section that resulted in the arrival of our very premature son. Following delivery, he went into trauma and was whisked off to another hospital's intensive care unit. Then the news got worse: his condition was declining. After a difficult Saturday of crying out to God, I was scheduled to teach an adult class at my church. I had been walking my Sunday school class through the Psalms. When I entered the room that morning, I looked around and saw gifts stacked high from people who had no idea our son had been born. They were throwing us a surprise party, and there I was, alone, without my wife and baby. I wasn't even sure my son would survive. And when we finished the festivities, I rose to teach Psalm 145.

This psalm of praise forms an acrostic in which each verse begins with one letter of the Hebrew alphabet (except for one). The work, attributed to David, is divided into two parts—a call to praise and the reason for praise. And the key reason given for praise is the character of God. When I reached verse 9, I read those words: "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." And I was stopped short in my tracks.

In the middle of that lecture, God used this truth to relieve the huge burden I'd been carrying for thirty-six hours, wondering about his fairness and character. I reread it and reasoned, "If God is good to all, he can do nothing else." I reached out and grabbed that spiritual and emotional handle from the Word and clung to it, trusting the truth that God would be consistent with his character, no matter what the outcome.

I had cried all the way to church; I sang all the way to the hospital. By God's grace my wife recovered, and our son went on to thrive, but through the years we have had many more opportunities to trust. And we have not always had happy endings. But through the illnesses and deaths of family members, through walking the unseen territories of war and loss, and through shouldering many traumas of people we love, we've had numerous opportunities to wonder about the character of God. Yet because of his promise, we believe in the divine mystery we don't fully understand: God's character and kingdom are glorious and gracious. Indeed, "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made"—including me and including you. We may not understand his ways, but we can trust his heart. And that is cause for praise.

Dallas Theological Seminary's mission is to glorify God by equipping godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide.

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Mark L. Bailey, President

John C. Dyer, Executive Director of Communications and Educational Technology

Sandra L. Glahn, Editor-in-Chief

Keith D. Yates, Director of Creative Services and Publications

Debbie J. Stevenson, Production Manager

Karen Grassmick and Kelley Mathews, Copy editing services

CONTENTS

"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:9).



Front Cover: ART SHOW WINNER: "2012"

DTS held its inaugural Arts Week during the Fall 2013 semester. Events included a juried art show with the theme "Ancient Roots, New Beginnings" based on Isaiah 11:1. An independent outside judge chose the winner who, as it happened, was the only DTS graduate to enter the show. Laci Parker (MA/MC, 2013) graduated from our Media Arts and Worship (formerly Media Arts in Ministry) track. Her oil-on-wood-panel piece, "2012," appears on the cover of this issue, and she described it as follows: "My paintings consist of people I know, but [the paintings] do not include the whole representation so the viewer can imagine a completed image. Isaiah 11:1 refers to an anticipated figure, but the original hearers had to rely on limited information and trust the Deliverer to fulfill his prophecy."



4 | Who Was That Young Man?

A two-verse story in the Gospel of Mark about a young man fleeing naked from the scene of Jesus's arrest has been the subject of much speculation. Who was he, and how does the narrative about him fit with Mark's message? Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla, associate professor of Pastoral Ministries, says the answers lie in the text itself, and they point to God's amazing grace.



8 | Seta Saleh: Seeing the New Picture

"Sixty to seventy percent of Iranian churches are populated by women," according to DTS alumna Seta Saleh. Born in Beirut to Armenian parents, Seta now lives in Los Angeles, but she frequently travels to the Middle East to help equip Iranian pastors to minister to women. "The mutual respect is a beautiful thing," she said. "Men and women partnering for the sake of the gospel..."



12 | Slicing through the Jungle with a Butter Knife: A Student Profile of Aubrey Collins

Eleven years ago, Aubrey Collins arrived in Dallas with sixty-five cents in his pocket and a dream of attending DTS. This May he plans to graduate, and along the way he has accumulated quite a collection of "God sightings."



Also in this issue:

Campus News.....	14
Exclusive Online Content.....	17
Resources.....	18
Art Show Runner Up.....	20

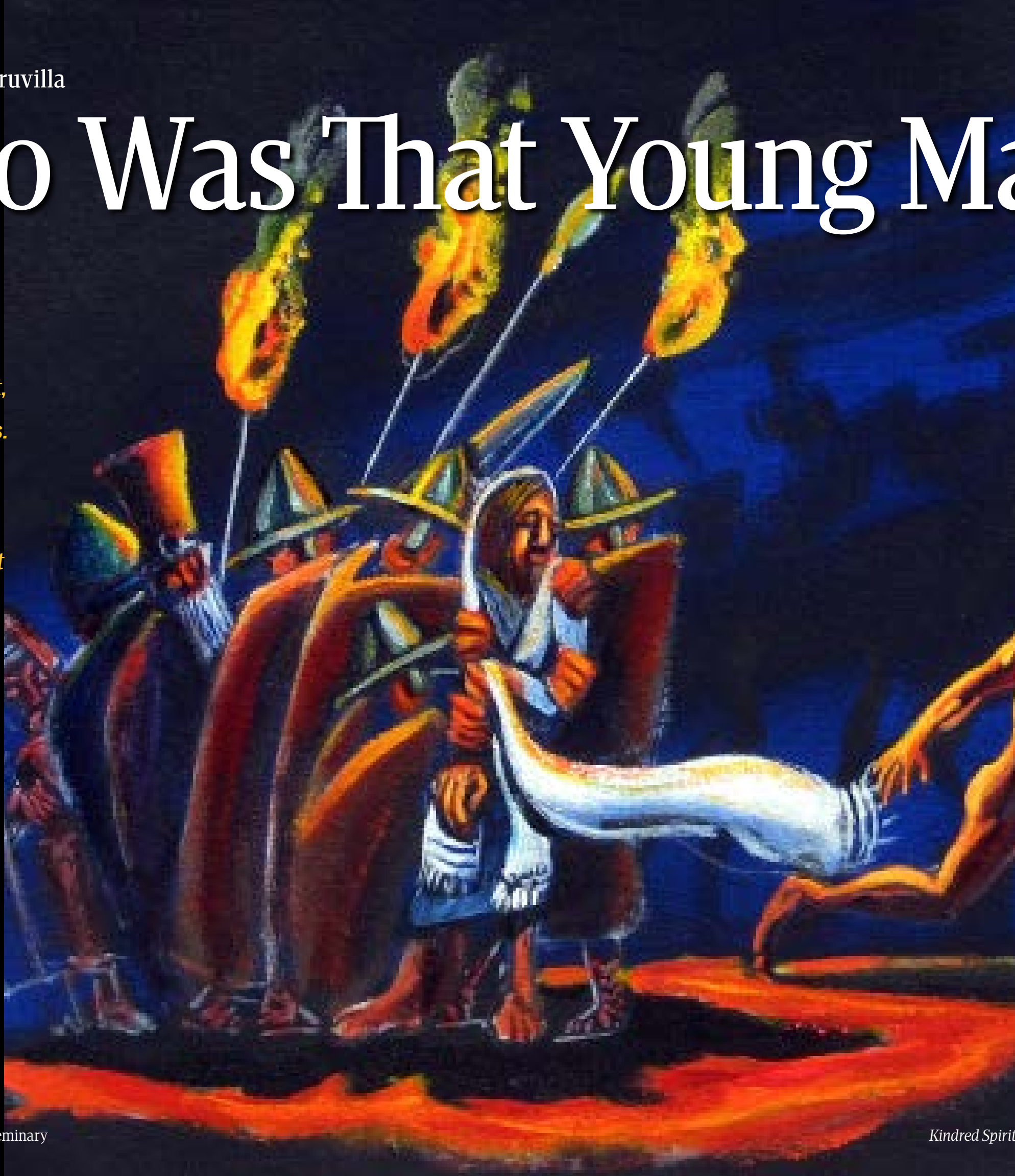
By Dr. Abraham Kuruville

Who Was That Young Man?

*“A young man,
wearing nothing
but a linen garment,
was following Jesus.
When they seized
him, he fled naked,
leaving his garment
behind.”*

(Mark 14:51–52)

Detail of original artwork
by Michael Donnelly, titled
“Study for Mark 14:52, No 2,”
2010, acrylic and gouache on
paper, 24 x 28 cm. Used by
permission.



We find this story in Mark's Gospel right after the account of Jesus's arrest, and it's one of the least understood narratives in the entire New Testament. Scholars have described the account as strange, bizarre, confusing, enigmatic, and whimsical. But this two-verse story is in the Bible, so we have to assume Mark included it for a reason. Who was the young man, and—more importantly—why did Mark include this information about him?

continued >>



(Un)Cloaked in Mystery

Most scholars believe that, like an artist painting himself in a corner of his canvas, Mark included a cameo of himself in his Gospel. The history of identifying this character with the author himself began with a thirteenth-century Coptic manuscript in which a footnote identified the young man as Mark the Evangelist (and also as James, son of Joseph). But Papias, the early second-century bishop of Hierapolis, declared that “Mark neither heard the Lord nor followed him” (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15) during Jesus’s lifetime. Others have speculated that the naked runaway was Lazarus, or Joseph of Arimathea, or a number of others. For some scholars, the fact that Matthew and Luke omitted this misadventure provides proof enough that it lacks any obvious theological meaning and that it is irrelevant to the purpose of Mark’s overall story.

What Was Mark Doing?

Such hypotheses and evaluations tacitly assume that Mark was an inept writer. But such a conclusion is unwarranted; of sloppy editing, Mark knows nothing. His work is the product of a sophisticated theological mind, assisted by the Holy Spirit, of course.

In fact, with this vignette, as with all of the scenes in his Gospel, Mark was doing something deliberate and purposeful, as narrators always do. Macbeth, for instance, is not a brochure detailing the history of Scotland, but a work that warns of the dangers of gaining a kingdom by losing one’s soul. Authors do something with what they say. Mark had a goal in telling this particular story. And to determine this “doing,” we must pay close attention to the text itself.

Symbol of Failure

The juxtaposition of the brief episode

in question with that of the disciples’ fleeing is telling. Following the betrayal by Judas and the arrest of Jesus (14:43–49), all the disciples left him and fled (v. 50). Immediately thereafter comes this account of a young man who “followed Jesus” and who, when seized, abandoned his garment and fled. It is significant that this youth is described as one who “followed” Jesus. To follow was what Jesus called the disciples to do, and following was what they had been doing. “Following” is therefore a literary clue. Mark is labeling the young man as a “disciple.” The disciples followed; the young man followed. The disciples fled; the young man fled. Here, then, in the picture of the naked runaway, followers have become “flee-ers.” In Mark’s narrative, the ignominious flight of this anonymous sympathizer serves to underline the complete failure of Jesus’s disciples.

At one time these disciples had left all to follow him. But now, in the abandonment of even the shirt off this young man’s back, Mark shows his readers that the disciples have left all to get away from Jesus. The writer displays this naked runaway as symbolic of the total abandonment of Jesus by the band of disciples who fled to escape the consequences of association with him.

Shame of Abandonment

But why include this little scene? The only substantive fact added here is that the young man had an unfortunate wardrobe malfunction. His nakedness, mentioned twice, points to the shameful of the disciples’ abandonment. Those who had been called to follow had failed. They chose shame over fidelity to Jesus.

At the Mount of Olives on his way to Gethsemane, Jesus had warned his disciples that they would all fall away

(v. 27). Peter protested that even if all fell away, he would not (v. 29); and the rest of the disciples vehemently denied the possibility that they would be faithless (v. 31). Yet, now, they fled.

Failure! And who among us has not failed in our discipleship as we follow Jesus? In one way or another, in some fashion or another, we have all fallen—in sin, in faithfulness, in courage, commitment. And we continue to stumble in discipleship. Is there hope for us?

Exchange of Clothing

What is interesting in this cryptic story is that there is only one other instance of the Greek word for “linen cloth” in Mark’s Gospel—in reference to the burial shroud of Jesus (15:46). There, as with the story of our naked runaway, the word occurs twice. What a clever narrative strategy! In utterly discreditable circumstances, the disciple is stripped of the “linen cloth” he wore, and following an equally degrading assassination, a “linen cloth” becomes Jesus’s burial shroud. The former garment, which represents shame, buries Jesus in death. In other words, Jesus gets the garment of shame from the young man. That, of course, is not to assert that it was the one and same linen cloth. Rather, Mark uses the cloth as a literary device.

The purpose for this device becomes evident when we read the announcement of Jesus’s resurrection (16:1–8). Another “coincidence”: there we find the only other use in all of Mark of the term “young man”—to describe the angelic reporter clad in white (16:5). The only reason for Mark’s unique appellation, labeling as “young man” the one whom the other Gospel-writers called “angel,” must have been to link the two incidents with “young man” in them, in Mark 14 and 16, respectively.

But this “young man” in Mark 16 wears no “linen cloth”; he is wearing white. Another “coincidence”: the only other instance of the word “white” in Mark’s Gospel is where the garments of Jesus’s Transfiguration are so described (9:3). Aha! So that’s where the “young man” in Mark 16 got his whites: Jesus donated his garment of glory to the “young man.”

It appears, then, that garments have been exchanged (in a literary sense, of course): the “linen cloth” the young man wore, that was stripped from him rendering him naked (14:51–52), covered Jesus’s body in the tomb (15:46). In exchange, the “white” garment Jesus wore at his transfiguration now covers the young man who makes the announcement at the empty tomb (16:5). In other words, the runaway’s garment of shame in Mark 14 becomes Jesus’s in Mark 15, and Jesus’s garment of glory in Mark 9 becomes the reporter’s in Mark 16.

The garment of shame of the “young man” buried Jesus; Jesus’s garment of glory restores the “young man.” All of this not-so-subtle literary sleight of hands points to the rehabilitation of the failed disciple: the naked, shamed one is clothed, and this with the clothing of glory of his master, while Jesus takes on the clothing of shame, the garb of failed followers.

This artistic portrayal of the exchange of garments bears an implicit promise: for those disciples who have failed in discipleship, God offers hope. Yes, there is hope for all of us who follow Jesus, albeit stumbling and failing, clumsy and hesitant. The shame of our failures is exchanged for the brilliance of Jesus’s glory, and we have hope indeed—because of what our Lord did for us. Amazing grace! ■

Dr. Abraham Kuruville (ThM, 2002), associate professor of Pastoral Ministries, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He is also a medical doctor specializing in dermatology. His research interests include hermeneutics as it operates in the homiletical undertaking and the theology and spirituality of preaching and pastoral leadership. Single by choice, he also has a special interest in the theology of Christ-centered singleness and celibacy.

Editor’s note: At Dr. Kuruville’s website, homiletix.com/preaching-resources/abes-articles/, you can find and download the original version of this article that appeared in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.

