

**Pastor Adrienne Meier**  
**April 3, 2026, Good Friday**  
**St. Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **A Certain Young Person**

**Mark 14:43-15:47**

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In the 1980s, Father Greg Boyle became a priest at one of the poorest Catholic churches in Los Angeles. The parish served the two largest housing projects west of the Mississippi, and one of the most concentrated areas of gang activity in the country—more than the entire rest of L.A. With his congregation, Father Greg started Homeboy Industries in 1988 to improve the lives of former gang members. It has become the largest gang intervention program in the world. They offer employment and re-entry programs, substance abuse resources, legal resources, case management, mental health services, domestic violence intervention. And, since they opened, they've removed over 3000 tattoos a month. Gang tattoos make it hard to get a job, initially why they started offering the service, but, according to their website, most people get their gang tattoos removed because they want to set a good example for their children. The tattoo removal service has become the main avenue for people get connected with the many other services at Homeboy Industries, so they don't just get a job, or set a good example, but they get a mental health services, or a GED, or training for an even better, more stable job. It is a opportunity to exchange an old life for something new. This is the story and glory of the cross, an exchange of our deaths for Christ's life.

Of all the gospels, only Mark records this odd little story from the garden about "a certain young person," at the end of our second gospel reading this evening. While it probably isn't odd that Luke and Matthew, when they consulted Mark's passion narrative, left the young person like—oh, forgive me—like he left his linen wrappings behind. It is odd in its brevity. Odd in its placement. It is odd in its details, for sure, which are at least good for a chuckle and maybe a few points at our next trivia night.

This odd little story reminds me of this early atonement theory—so that's a way of understanding what happens on the cross...This early atonement theory says that the cross is God's greatest trick—and it's played on the devil, played on the forces of sin and evil. Gregory of Nyssa compared it to a baited fish hook and Augustine called it a mousetrap—the human part of Jesus is the bait, and his divinity is the trap that catches the devil in his schemes. The theory admits that while mood of the cross may be somber, we can never fully mask the joy that salvation brings.

But this young person, he's more than comic relief. He's an interesting character because there is this young person in the garden and then, on Sunday morning, there's a young

person, again, at the empty tomb—not an angel, like other gospels say, a young person, again. And then there’s the linen cloth which gets unfortunately left behind.

And the linen cloth that Joseph of Arimathea buys and wraps Jesus’s body in. While there are other mentions of clothing—the mocking purple robes and Jesus’s own gambled-away garments—this linen cloth is something else. And then, at the end, when the women see the young person at the empty tomb, he is clothed again, but no longer in grave clothes, this time his clothes are the same dazzling white that Jesus turned at the Transfiguration.

For a long time, scholars taught that this was Mark’s “signature,” a view of the author, himself. But the layers of linen and dazzling robes give me pause. Mark is doing something else here, just like he does throughout his gospel, layering image upon image. It may be most important to remember that Mark’s story is circular. The end sends you back to the beginning. The Transfiguration works as a mid-point in Jesus’s life story, but it also serves as a resurrection account. The story sends you back to Galilee, back to the beginning, so that the ones who betray, deny, and flee, can exchange their loneliness and abandonment for a place that the Teacher’s feet. Where doubt can be exchanged for another measure of faith, to grow like a mustard seed, in whose branches the birds of the air find refuge.

Luther calls this “the happy exchange.” He argues that, in faith, what happens on the cross—the whole Christ-event—is that Christ takes what is ours—our sinfulness, our condemnation, our death—and gives us what is his—life, and grace, and salvation.

That’s what’s at stake with our young guy in Mark’s gospel. All this “exchange:” a chance for a new start, new life, new creation. One set of linen grave clothes changed for one dazzling white robe of resurrection. One anonymous, shameful, fleeing figure becomes the unlikely herald of the resurrection.

And, maybe this is too much Easter for a Good Friday service, though I’m really not sure how we faithfully pull them apart. The crucified one is the resurrected one, and vice versa. This circular story that pulls us in again and again, because we’ll fall again and again, because life will pull us down again and again, because we’ll get tangled up in all the sinful systems of this world again and again. This odd little story is ours. We flee in shame, but we are raised again in glory. We deny—deny the one who is our life—deny life to others, but we are raised again—a new start, a new creation. Our collective sin, fear, and guilt exchanged for life—for all—by the compassion, grace, and mercy of Christ. And, if we let it, our thirst for war, our quest for violence, our desire for power, exchanged for the peace, and healing, and love of God.

But there’s one more thing about this story, about these clothes. The dazzling white robe is also the mark of a martyr, of someone who, for the sake of Christ, has given themselves away. Fred Niedner, emeritus professor from Valpo, he once said, “You know what these threads are worth? They’re the hottest ticket in town.” They may be, to us, a sign of life,

and they're also evidence of where we've been, and what God, in Christ, has done for us. And, as such, Neidner says, "They're your ticket to hell." He says, "They authorize you to hang out in tombs, where you can be with the brokenhearted, the empty, the self-exiled, the ones who have lost everything, every shred of self-respect. There, in the tomb, at the gates of hell, you give yourself to them. You open your arms, your own nail-scarred hands." You give yourself away.

Our happy exchange of death to life is an exchange of an ending for a beginning, and invitation to go with Jesus back to Galilee, back to the people who most need a word of life and grace and truth—back to our own neighbors and neighborhoods, proclaiming a radical word: surely *this one is more* than a king, this is the very Son of God. Amen.