



# SAINT MARK'S

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH

This is the first sermon of our Lenten series. We are using the daily videos of the brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist to understand the 5 marks of mission of the Episcopal Church. They call these the 5 marks of love. After all—how can we engage in mission without understanding that everything we do as followers of Christ is based on love. We are here in this world to understand how to love most fully.

Today's mark of Love: Proclaim the Good News! The brothers of SSJE have distilled each mark of mission to one word: This week it is TELL. And of course, *tell* means: to communicate information, facts, or news to someone.

After all—it's hard to proclaim the good news if we don't tell anyone.

And we have an obligation to tell this news-- this truth- the truth Jesus shared with us. And here it is: ***love is the end of every lesson.***

There's a part in the Harry Potter series where an evil teacher has Harry write lines as a punishment. Some of you may well remember writing "lines"—though I'm not sure teachers use this as a punishment anymore. Writing "lines" is when you write a sentence or a phrase over and over again so it will be indelibly etched in your mind.

“I will not talk in class.” That was one I remember writing—oh-- a couple of hundred times.

Well, Harry had been trying to tell the truth about something important that happened while in this teacher’s class—and she refused to believe him. So for detention she had him write “I must not tell lies” over and over again for several hours.

While he wrote, he had to use an enchanted quill. This quill carved the words onto Harry’s hand as he wrote the line on the paper. Each time he wrote the line, it would be cut into his hand. Trust me, he never forgot that message: *“I must not tell lies.”*

Every day when I attended chapel in Seminary, I noticed words carved into the wall. They said, “Seek the truth—come whence it may, cost what it will.” Because I saw this sentence every day, it’s carved on my heart. *“Seek the truth, come whence it may, cost what it will.”*

And if we are going to proclaim—to tell—the good news of Christ, we must not tell lies. We must seek and tell the truth.

Interestingly, truth vs. lies is exactly what the gospel reading is about today.

Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. 40 days and 40 nights is an ancient Hebrew idiom that means “a long time”. So Jesus was there a long time, when we was joined by the devil.

Now, some of us think: “devil” and we think of the traditional horns, pitchfork and craggy face--or maybe we think of “the evil one”, or perhaps even “the tempter.”

Well, you know me—I went back to the original Greek to see what word we have translated into English as “the devil”.

The word used is diabolos—sounds very devil-like, doesn't it? But this word has three definitions in Greek: slanderous, The Slanderer, and – the last definition-- the Devil. I'd be willing to bet they are all connected.

Jesus took on The Slanderer. Webster's dictionary defines slander as: "false and/ or damaging statements." So The Slanderer would be someone who makes false and/or damaging statements.

So this 'prophet of false statements' says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

What the devil is saying is that Jesus—being Jesus-can do anything he wants.

Jesus says to the devil: "Tiny truth, mostly falsehood--- we do not live by bread alone. We do not live just by the food that we eat from the earth—or indeed by anything we glean from this earth! We live fully only when we understand that we are connected to God—and everything we really need comes from that connection."

The devilish purveyor of false statements then says: "It's all about you—you *are so beloved of God*, God will prove it if you ask."

"Mmmmm," Jesus says him, "Again, little bit of truth—but mostly false. Where there is real love there is no need for 'proof of love.'"

The prophet of falsehoods tries a third time—"I can help you rule this world, and I'll give you everything you ask for—if you only fall down and worship me."

Jesus looks at the King of Slander steadily: "God rules and loves all-- and I live to proclaim that love and to show all

people that they are a part of it. *I must not tell lies.* You are a liar.” And the great Slanderer, the Spirit of Lies-- leaves him.

Maybe our 40 days in the wilderness of Lent isn't so much about "giving something up"--it's about defiantly rejecting delusion, and bravely confronting the reality and truth of our lives. It's striving to stop lying to others and ourselves. It's about telling the truth.

Jesus wants us to know the truth about God's vast love for us and for all of creation. Jesus asks us to follow this love, live it out in our lives. We can do all that he did, and more. He said so. Do you believe this?

Love God and love your neighbor. My neighbor is everyone who is not me. Your neighbor is everyone who is not you. Do you believe this?

God loves everyone unconditionally. Nadia Boltz Webber says it well: “Before we do anything wrong and before we do anything right, God has named and claimed us as God's own.”

It's hard to love our neighbor if we don't believe that **we** are *beloved*. Do we believe this?

We must not tell lies or even half-truths—we must tell the whole truth.

We must tell it with our lips- and in our lives.

Love God and Love our neighbor, we are all connected to God, God loves everyone. *Love is the end of every lesson.*

That's the Truth. That's the Good News.

Proclaim the Good News of Christ! It's our first mark of mission. Amen.