



# SAINT MARK'S

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH

For the first 4 weeks in our series on the 5 Marks of Mission – we have talked about mission in terms of relationships— the 1<sup>st</sup> relationship:

- Proclaiming Christ to each other- telling people the truth about this Jesus of Nazareth whom we follow
- Teaching - to instruct and nurture the followers of Jesus
- Tending-- Responding to human need
- Transforming unjust structures, challenging violence, pursuing peace and reconciliation for all people

All of the first four marks of mission involve our human community—how we see it, how we nurture it, how we change it to benefit all people.

Now--in the final week of our sermon series—we are looking at the 5<sup>th</sup> mark of Mission: Treasure. At first I was a little miffed with Danny for making me talk about money AGAIN—but he gently pointed out that the 5<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission is defined as “striving to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth.”

*And then it hit me-- what if we were able to value our relationship to God's creation the same way we value our relationships with people? Could we really view creation as I-thou, rather than I-it?*

Scientists say that the universe is not a collection of objects- it's a web of interrelationships. In other words: all of creation is connected on a molecular level. What hurts one, hurts the other.

A few years ago, when I hit one of my BIG birthday's, I went to one of my favorite places in the world. It seemed like a good way to begin a decade.

Spur Cross Ranch National Park. I loved going to Spur Cross Ranch because all I could hear when I got out of the car and stood in the parking lot was the wind, the birds, insects, and silence. You never heard a car, or a plane, or voices or construction, or any sounds of civilization.

Just a profound silence.

Now---even in our airtight homes, I still hear cars outside, the ticking of my living room clock, the sound of the furnace cycling on and off, the refrigerator going on. Or my cat trying incessantly to “talk” to me.

And that's without the television on.

Have you ever been in a place where you can't hear the distance sound of a horn or cars, or traffic, or people? Spur Cross Ranch. It's the quietest place I've ever been.

Science magazine has a map of the quietest places in America. I was really surprised to see that there is no place in the eastern 2/3 of the country that registers under 36 decibels in this scientific study.

All the places that register less than 20 decibels of noise are in the west. Spur Cross Ranch is in one of those places. It's not a popular place—like Yellowstone or Zion. It's a small park. Probably has five or so trails, and fewer than 10 people a day usually walk them. But there are lots of things that live there. Lots of birds and hawks, and I've spotted fox and deer.

Many scientific studies show that walking in the woods is good for us. Trees give off chemicals that actually boost our immunity and help us experience better health. Wide open spaces cause our blood pressure to drop.

But the world many of us—including me-- remember from childhood--is slipping away. My neighborhood growing up was surrounded by woods—and it was our playground. As our world population rises exponentially, “unimproved land” as we like to call it- disappears. Do you hear the way we call something we don’t put our mark on—unimproved?

Don’t you think it sounds kind of arrogant to think we can improve on something God has made?

- At the current rate of deforestation, our planet’s tropical rainforest could be gone in as little as 40 years.
- Our oceans are being overfished to the point of exhaustion and our coral reefs are dying from ocean acidification.
- Pollution from our cars and industry cause more and more cases of asthma a year.
- Along the southern coast, chemicals from lawns, gardens and orchards are producing bloom after bloom of red tide- toxic to humans, fish and oceanic plant life.
- Garbage is clogging huge parts of our seas.
- Biologists say that we are at the start of the largest mass extinction of plants, fish and animals since the disappearance of the dinosaurs.

Remember: all of creation is connected on a molecular level. What hurts one part, hurts every part.

When society teaches us that life as a game in which we are the competitors-- we begin to grasp, to cling, to hold. We defend what we have and look for ways to get more. We become greedy of nature’s resources. When we see the world from this perspective, we view natural resources as objects to control or consume-- or as obstacles to overcome.

It is astonishing how in the last 100 years we have gone from seeing Creation as something we live in and live with, to something we go to for recreation *when we have time*. If our life with Creation is going to be a relationship—I think we’d rather it looks more like a loving relationship with a nurturing parent, and less like that 5 cousin once removed that you see at weddings.

If at the end of our lives we died and stood before God, what would we say if God asked us, “What did you do for the world I gave you?”

We need a powerful new story. We need to remember that we are a part of nature and not separate from it. We need a story that locates humans smack dab in the middle of creation—a part of it — not looking down on it because of our “massive intellect”, and not diminished by the universe into “cosmic insignificance”.

We are part of that web of interrelationships the scientists talk about. We are part of the vast interlinking parts of creation. What happens to the humans or the world—affects the others.

We actually have a relationship with the trees and the oceans and the air and the bees! Don’t believe it? Take one of those things out of the equation—the trees—which give us the oxygen we breathe--, a vibrant ocean—which cools the planet and feeds us, breathable air, or bees to pollinate all our food—if we took any one of these things out of the equation- - we will all soon see just **how** connected we are to our planet: this creation over which the Spirit of God roams.

So, this coming week let’s all try and be more aware of where we live and move and have our being—God’s Earth—our home. Touch the ground, feel the wind, listen to the birds—connect to it. Pray for Mother Earth. And stand up for her when she is in danger.

“What did you do for the world I gave you?”-- God.  
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Lent 5

So at the end of our lives, when we die and stand before God, and he asks us, “what did you do for the world I gave you?” we can say: we loved and cared for her.

Amen.