



**The First Sunday of Lent (A)**  
**March 1, 2020**  
***The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector***

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

In preparation for today, I read the following: “What gives true life does not take a short-cut to wisdom.” “What gives true life does not take a short-cut to wisdom.” We could spend the next hour on that sentence. Life well-lived has much to do with understanding that there are few shot-cuts in life.

Wisdom, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is borne out of discernment and truth. Wisdom is crafted in the furnace of experience, reflection and assessment. Wisdom and its implications in life have far-reaching effects when seen over the long-haul of life.

The wisdom of today’s Gospel can be experienced in the story of the passage. The story is rich and compelling. Before we dive into it, I wanted to share with you two brief stories.

Recently, I found myself in a furniture store. Since I had shopped there before, my contact information was in their system.

The sales person pulled up two addresses for me: 134 N. Division and my address on Cross Creek. I relayed that I worked on Division which prompted a discussion about St. Mark’s. Whenever I have an opportunity to say where I work, I go for it! The sales person said that his parents had been married at St. Mark’s in the 1940’s. He, himself, had never been here. Seemingly engaged, the sales person began asking questions about the Episcopal Church in comparison with other Traditions.

In that encounter, I was moved to ‘tell the story’. Before I left, I gave him my business card and invited him to come and see.

On Tuesday morning last week, I had the honor of being involved in the dedication of the new chapel at Spectrum Butterworth Hospital. I was asked to give the historical perspective of the founding of the hospital.

I told the story that St. Marks’ founded the St. Mark’s Home and Hospital in 1875. Just two years earlier, the church’s front porch, transepts, chancel and chapel were added to the 1848 building.

In 1888, Mr. Richard Butterworth, a parishioner of St. Mark’s, gave St. Mark’s a parcel of land on the corner of Crescent and Bostwick to construct a new hospital. St. Mark’s Rector was the head of the governing board of the hospital. Oh, My!

In the mid-1890’s, St. Mark’s decided to transition the religious institution to a secular one. The seal of the corporation was changed from St. Mark’s Home and Hospital to Butterworth Hospital to honor Mr. Butterworth. At the chapel dedication, all eyes and ears were peaked to hear a story of which most of them were unaware.

Our lives are about stories. Who among us doesn’t enjoy a good story? Who among us doesn’t appreciate a story which has truth, depth and meaning? Who among us isn’t curious as to what historians will tell about the politics of our day, stories with consequences and serious impacts for years to come?

The story of Jesus being “driven into the wilderness”, as one translation calls it, is a fascinating story. It has movie implications all over it. There is a wilderness and the main characters of Jesus, the Son of God and God the Holy Spirit. Oh, and let us not forget the Tempter.

Jesus is confronted with temptations, remarkable temptations. The temptations surely challenged the depths of his newly embraced title as the Beloved of God, a title proclaimed at his Baptism.

I can imagine the Baptism of Jesus being a profound moment in his life, a moment of infused grace and nascent wisdom. I can imagine the temptation in the wilderness as an extended moment in the life of Jesus in which grace and wisdom were much needed. In this story, there were no short-cuts to the decisions he had to make, as he was tempted and tempted again.

The complex nature of Jesus as both God and a human being is the ‘stuff’ of great mystery. That mystery unfolds in today’s Gospel.

The story of Jesus in the wilderness is about Jesus making decisions to be true to his mission in life. On this First Sunday of Lent, this story in the life of Jesus is not just graphic but tells us much about the humanity of Jesus having to deal with temptation in life.

Can we identify with Jesus being tempted? When having to make decisions in life, can we see ourselves with the need to employ grace and wisdom to be wise and prudent? Can we see the need to let go of selfish agendas in order to put the greater good at the forefront of our decision-making? As Christians, can we see the wisdom to put Christ as the very focus of our lives?

During the Season of Lent, we will hear all kinds of biblical stories. We began today’s story with The Great Litany which was first published in 1544, a prayer which calls us to take Lent seriously.

Lent is a time of walking with Jesus on his road of life. It is a time of reflection, introspection, assessment and decision making.

Will we pray and worship more and give more of ourselves for the sake of others? Will we make time to see ourselves as God sees us and embrace what God possibly desires for us in life? If needed, will we ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation with God and with others?

Lent calls us to be one with Jesus and one another. It calls us to holiness of life. Here, we are called to intimately share in the story of Jesus, his life and the giving of that life for others. His story is our story, as we experience it at St. Mark’s.

My guess is that we are here this morning because we want to participate in the story of God’s love for us in Jesus. I invite you to tell the story of God’s love and invite others to experience it at St. Mark’s! Here, we invite Jesus into our hearts and participate as best we can with the grace and wisdom which are ours as followers of Jesus.

The Season of Lent is not unlike an extended retreat with Jesus. Let us open ourselves to what Jesus has to tell us, listen intently and respond with grace and wisdom of heart. Amen.