

- I. From a young age we are taught to never tell a lie like George Washington. We are preached this message by our families, teachers, coaches, mentors, and definitely at church. Outside of the commandments to honor God and honor thy father and mother, the commandment to not lie affected my daily life more than any other. Do not lie or you are not honoring God. Do not lie or you are not honoring your mother and father. Do not lie or there will be consequences – sent to your room, stuff taken away: no TV, no LEGOs, no GI Joes. I have never seen my mom more irritated at me then when I lied to her. I can't remember what the lie was, but whatever it was, it wasn't good. She took my GI Joe Tiger Helicopter and slammed it to the ground. I have inherited this lack of patience of lying. There are certain misdemeanors that we let slide for better or worse in our household, but nothing riles me or Katherine up more than our children lying to us.
- II. But what about telling the truth? Has telling the truth ever got you in trouble? Was there a time when being honest left you ostracized by your family or friends? We are instructed by our family and the church to always tell the truth. The Bible says the truth will make you free. But sometimes, sometimes, truth leads to punishment; sometimes it may get you arrested and killed. This is exactly what happens to John the Baptist. He must tell people about the kingdom of God, and that the Emperor has no clothes, which leads to his incarceration and death.
- III. In the previous passage, which was last Sunday's text, we read that Jesus was rejected by his hometown, by his own family. He then sent the disciples out to heal and share the good news, and this is the interlude Mark chooses to report to the reader as we wait anxiously for them to reappear in the storyline. This passing story of John the Baptist connects back to the first chapter when Mark shared the bad news that John the Baptist was arrested, but he moved immediately on to the next piece Jesus' story. So now Mark gives the culmination of the evangelist's story. Inserting the fate of John the Baptist here is like someone telling you about a plane crash moments before you got on your first flight, it's not exactly the encouraging word you want to hear.
- IV. Several years ago I took a youth group to Guatemala for a mission trip. A couple months before a Session member along with his wife went on vacation there. When they returned, I asked him how it was and if he had any tips. He said the place was beautiful and he enjoyed Antigua which is of one the main tourist cities. When we returned from the mission trip, he pulled me aside and told me that he was so glad we made it back okay. He went on to tell me, that while we were gone he and his wife prayed for us day and night because when they were on their trip, they were robbed twice. Once, their bus was stopped by bandits, they were boarded and robbed; and the second time they were walking the streets of a major city and robbed at gun point in broad day light. I am so thankful he waited until after the trip to share this information, and didn't go on to share it with the parents. The last thing I needed was to give the parents more anxiety on the church's first international mission trip.

- V. No one wants to hear about the negative possibilities of their actions. But Mark wants to be upfront and honest about the trials and tribulations facing Jesus' disciples, and not only the ones Jesus personally sent out but all those who would follow after. Telling the truth will get you in trouble sometimes, especially when that truth is to those in power, or questions the validity of their authority. Kings and queens, don't want to hear that they are not all powerful. They don't want to hear some commoner spreading the truth that they have not been found righteous according to the law. Their reptilian brain kicks in, and those in power will rarely choose to flee, but will stand their ground and fight, or at the very least throw the accuser in the dungeons, to have their head lopped off at a later date.
- VI. Mark makes Herod a sympathetic figure in this passage, as if he has no agency. We're told that he was intrigued by John and liked to listen to him preach while imprisoned, but in the end Herod's curiosity is not enough to save John's life. When the moment of truth comes for Herod, we are shown his true character. His internal monologue saying something like this, "Well, I promised my step-daughter so I don't have choice but to agree to it or I'll be breaking an oath." Are you kidding me? He was already living in sin, everyone knew it, its not like one more in order to save someone's life is going to tarnish his impeccable record. Herod, like Pilate later in the decision to crucify Jesus, could have made his own decision. He had the power, he had the authority, but what was one more life in order to placate the people and consolidate power?
- VII. Mark is being as open as he can with his readers about the consequences of following Christ, the implications of their decisions to preach and live out the Kingdom of God instead of going along with the powers of this world. The Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed will put you at odds, at one point or another, with those in power. The journey of Christ is not an easy one to make, it does not lead to palace invitations, and luxurious banquets. I don't mean to be overly dramatic but a life in Christ as inconvenient as it might be, as harsh as it might sound, leads to the cross. As one writer puts it, "Our affirmation of and allegiance to the truth of the Gospel cannot be a hedge position. It's all or nothing, regardless of the consequences."<sup>1</sup>
- VIII. Life is defined by what you are willing to live for, and what you are willing to die for. What is the truth for each one of us that makes our life worth living? What is the truth that we are willing to lay down our life for? Those are not questions I can answer for you, only you and God know the answers to those questions. But hopefully the truths that form the foundation of who you are shine through in your words and deeds for all to see. What I can offer you this morning is a truth that is worth believing, that is worth proclaiming and sharing.
- IX. The truth is this: while we are sinners Christ died for us, Christ was raised for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old life has gone and a new life has begun. This truth is unsettling. It means that those in

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<sup>1</sup> Vitalis Hoffman, Mark G., "Lectionary Reading Mark 6:14-29," workingpreacher.com, 2009.

power do not have a claim upon our lives. It means that all glory, laud, and honor is due to God, and God alone. It means that our allegiance above all else is to God, and the way we show that allegiance is to love God and our neighbor.

- X. This truth upsets the system. It means we care for the least in our community more than we seek out an invitation to the best banquet. It means that we cherish each and every life on this planet, and demand the best for them because in them we see the face of our Creator who has imprinted each of us with his divine image that no corporation, country, or individual can defile, that is the Gospel truth. God came to reconcile the whole world, not just the people we like, or that look like us, but the whole world. And we are God's agents carrying this mission throughout the world. That is the truth John the Baptist pointed towards, it is the life of Jesus Christ, and it is our calling as his disciples.