

*O GOD of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength; By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Good morning! Good morning at home!

A few weeks ago, when we began reading the Letter of St. James together, one of the main ideas I wanted you take along with you as we read was the idea of Biblical wisdom. You might recall that we actually defined wisdom, at least as far as the writers of the Bible were concerned, had to do with an arrangement of both heart and head, towards faithfulness to God's vision for His favorite Creation: humanity. You might also remember that God meant for his wisdom to be communicated to all peoples through the people that He had claimed for Himself by nature of His salvation; beginning with ancient Israel and then by those people who had gathered around the Messiah, Jesus. Again, to review, Biblical wisdom is less about the accrual and curation of knowledge (though learning is of high value), and more the cultivation of a type of humanity that is responsive to the call of God on their lives, a type of humanity that longs to be with God and walk in His ways, and in so doing serves everyone else such that all may enjoy God's blessing.

And in reading James' letter this morning, we meet wisdom again and are struck by an immediate and sharp contrast. Just as last week's text was bracing and evocative in warning us readers in the use of our tongues, today's reading immediately presents us with what wise people look like, and what unwise look like in dealing with one another. James begins this section with a rhetorical question: "Who are the wise ones among you?" He answers his rhetorical question with an exhortation: that wisdom be shown forth in a good life, by works done in gentleness born of the same wisdom. I suspect that James might have been thinking of Jesus' own teaching from Matthew 11, wherein he challenged the crowds around him to consider again the prophetic work of John the Baptist, and therefore recognize that Jesus is the Son of Man, the Christ. Those who had ears to hear would hear him to understand that Wisdom is known by her deeds, and therefore wisdom would be made known by the wise ones knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, and therefore seeking to act a lot like he does.

The alternative that James presents to his readers is as disappointing as it is realistic. Boastfulness, bitter envy, selfish ambition, traits he nominates directly, lead to disorder and wickedness. James even seems to admit that the way that these sorts of things present themselves can *seem* like wisdom, but he is quick to point out that this sort of "wisdom" smells a lot like brimstone. Disorder and wickedness are not wise things, and those that trade in them are, simply put, unwise. Thankfully, James

presents the reader with what wisdom looks like in action. Listen again. He wrote:

*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*

It feels like another gloss on Jesus' teaching from the Beatitudes, when Jesus tells us that "Blessed are the Peacemakers." By this logic, perhaps unsurprisingly, God's blessing reigns among those who make peace, who work in gentleness, whose purity, kindness, flexibility, and goodness are absolutely clear signs of their faithfulness to God's intention for them. Again, they are known by their wisdom. Thus, those who are centered in creating conflict, whose disputing comes from disordered desires rather than a desire to live in Godly wisdom, those folks have trouble praying. James essentially says that folks who continually engage in covetousness and ungodly conflict don't really even understand how to petition God in intercession; perhaps demanding things from God from a place of great pride rather than asking God for his help in humility. James ends this section with the medicine for such an affair of the heart: submission to God and resistance to the evil one. "Draw near to God," James writes, "And He will draw near to you."

Which seems so simple, so beautiful. But then in the process of drawing close to God, we begin to consider more carefully how we've been unwise, those moments when we've been covetous or needlessly contentious, when our demands come of pride rather than intercessions made from submission to God. What do we do when lately realize that we are on the wrong side of the wisdom that James presents?

Well, maybe don't run for vestry, eh?

And of course, run instead to Jesus. Consider again what he taught us today. Even as his closest friends and disciples were in the middle of screwing up, as they were in the middle of trying to figure out the succession plan after his departure, as they were vying for some broken view of greatness, he reminded them that greatness in the kingdom comes from service. Greatness for his people comes as a result of humility. Even this little episode at the end of our Gospel reading, wherein he teaches his friends to welcome a child into their midst, this is a vision of hospitality and vulnerability that runs completely against the kind of ideas of "greatness" that would have been entertained by people around Jesus, even those people closest to him. Again, the "greatest" among us in Christ's Kingdom are those who have put aside worldly ambition for a life of humble service.

In this, Christ shows us what it's like to actually live as if the Psalmist's words are true, that God is our helper; that it is the Lord who sustains our life. In drawing close to our God who loves us and care for us, as James recommended this morning, we would become yet more wise, we would ever evidence His wisdom and provision for us, and yes perhaps even draw even more people to know and enjoy the great salvation of his Son. I pray that as we do the work that God has given us, especially as we rejoice today in the return of weekly Sunday ministry especially for children, that we would all work together in service to one another, and that we would ever await God's presence among us to guide us into a ministry wherein our purity, peaceableness, gentleness, willingness to yield, fullness of mercy and abundance of good fruits, would be on display for the Glory of God. I pray that as you head out for your ministry at home, work, or school would be marked by the same virtue and that God's wisdom would be present with you wherever you go, and that you would even in your humility and peacefulness reflect the same wisdom to everyone you meet.

Pray for one another, my brothers and sisters, and draw close to Christ who saves you. Amen.