

James 3:13-18
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 26, 2021

Education is important. People in the Whitewater area certainly recognize that fact as a community with a university. Our nation spends billions of dollars annually on all levels of education from early childhood programs, through elementary and high schools to colleges and advanced degrees. We are filled with concern about how students fared with virtual learning during the months of shut-down from the pandemic.

We're not thinking about degrees or IQ or achievement test scores as James takes us on a look at wisdom today. There is a difference between knowledge accumulated and wisdom. The latter involves application to life experiences. Another dimension is added when we consider spiritual matters. Familiar is the passage, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It starts with faith, as the verse said it was the *beginning*. Acquiring wisdom is a lifelong process. That's why we encourage from these verses

GROW IN GOD'S WISDOM

- I. Expressed in humility
- II. Shown in service to others

Growth in godly wisdom will be expressed in humility. Wisdom is actually the opposite of how it's often represented. We're familiar with a "know-it-all." Such an individual feels superior to others. He or she thinks their views should be accepted and followed because they're so smart or well-educated, although the attitude isn't limited to those with lots of schooling. They look down on those they perceived to have lesser knowledge. That's not wisdom. It's arrogance. At times gifted students have disguised their abilities because they don't want to be viewed in that light but want to be liked.

The quality of humility James described as part of wisdom shows in meekness. It is considerate and courteous, gentle toward others. It won't puff you up with pride.

Humility results from the knowledge of yourself and your sins. It knows God's laws and sees your shortcomings. We haven't begun to keep the Lord's commands. We sin daily in our attitudes and actions. We may appear fine in the eyes of the world but not in comparison with God's standard of perfection. Each of us has our own weaknesses. We are unkind to others in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We have impure desires. Our motives are not all good and loving. Hatred and greed

fill our hearts. We do not show loyalty to God. Often he does not occupy the first position that he deserves in our lives. Repentance is the only proper attitude for us to have. Admit your sinful condition and need for a Savior.

That need has been supplied by Jesus, who lived and died for you. He provided it all: the removal of your sins and the status of righteous before God. You are welcome in heaven eternally. All that is yours by faith. His work motivates living in humility in our daily walk.

Yet it is the opposite of how we often live. In today's Gospel we witnessed the disciples arguing about who was the greatest and how that disrupted their bond. It misdirected their attention and energy from the task before them. That's Satan's goal and thus James labeled it "of the devil."

The "bitter envy and selfish ambition" James condemned come naturally. Self-preservation is our goal. We look out for number one, who is myself according to worldly wisdom. I gotta take care of my needs and desires first. So we will scrape and claw to get to the top. Other people are there to use and step on as we climb the ladder to success. When someone else does well, instead of rejoicing with them we are jealous. I think I should have the recognition they received. We seek to undermine or knock down them down, whatever works, all to advance ourselves. Isn't that assertiveness what the world admires as wise and great?

Such an attitude leads to boasting rather than humility. It puffs us up with pride and we put down others. As everyone contends for the top it leads to "disorder and every evil practice." How do we combat that tendency? Go to the Word of God. Hear his law to knock down the inflated view of self. Confess your sins and admit your inability to save yourself. Look to Jesus as your only hope, as your complete Savior. With that honest view of yourself and as you give him all the credit for saving you, you will be humble and grateful. It also changes your view of other people. They are all in the same boat; they have the same needs. You will eagerly tell them the good news because you want the same joy for them. Grow in God's wisdom that is expressed in such humility.

II.

Our changed mindset shows in service to others. That's because God's wisdom is pure. It is clean, not stained. It is not mixed with impure motives. Of course, we never find that purity in ourselves. It comes through Jesus, who cleanses us with his forgiveness and covers us with his holiness. All things that are right go back to him and his gospel message. However, the term "pure" does come to describe us as the Holy Spirit transforms our lives, leading us to help others.

As a result our behavior is ever promoting peace as James noted, then identifying several qualities involved in the effort. First on the list was considerate. As we act and react to life's situations we think of others and the effects of what we say and do will have on them. Will it lead them closer to Jesus or push them away? Will it build them up or tear them down? We seek what will benefit them spiritually.

We are submissive, as we put others ahead of ourselves. We will be yielding, although not compromising God's truth. James is speaking about the personal level. We will be willing to suffer injustice and mistreatment without anger or complaint as we trust in God to take care of us and to direct all for our good, despite what may be happening. We will not insist on our own rights, for we recognize there are bigger issues involved. We value others and treat them with kindness. As the Bible points out, "Each of you should look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

We will be full of mercy. We look to benefit others, especially those in need. We look for opportunities to help, not lending aid just when we can't avoid doing so without looking bad. Many needs exist, whether it is from disasters that occur regularly around the world or problems of health or aging right next door. Showing mercy is impartial. It is the opposite of showing favoritism, giving preference to the privileged which James condemned in the section of the epistle we heard as the Second Lesson last week. It is good to all, whether it is to your advantage or not. It especially seeks out those who can't repay you with similar kindness.

The serving actions of God's wisdom are sincere. That means there is no hypocrisy involved. Our helping hand is not a false front but is genuine. We are honest and truthful and not seeking a favor in return.

Results come from the actions of God's wisdom. "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." Relationships are improved. Right behavior often impacts the person on the receiving end to respond in kind. Just as meanness stirs up trouble, so kindness makes friends. There are times when it does not, and that's when our willingness to act rightly is put to the test. But it's also when we really need to persevere. Pick up the slack for others. Our sinful self yells, "Unfair!" Overcome its resistance. Especially we seek what is best morally and spiritually for the opponent. Help them on the path through life. Bring them to the Lord.

Mention of a harvest reminds us that producing a crop of righteousness is a growing process just like gardening or farming. We must prepare the soil, plant the seeds, add fertilizer, water the plants, remove the weeds and wait patiently. Here we are looking for growth in our own life as well as in that of others. Acquiring God's wisdom takes time for hearing the Word that is sown and receiving strength through the gospel message in Word and sacrament. The need is ongoing throughout life.

Opportunities abound to practice God's wisdom. Think of the various roles you have in life: in the home with your spouse, with children or grandchildren or with parents if you are the younger one. You rub shoulders with many at your place of work or study. By your calm acceptance of challenges and difficulties, you show the godly wisdom he has produced in you. Questions are asked and needs are encountered where you can provide help and comfort. Neighbors and friends also are target fields for service. So are fellow church members as we offer encouragement in time of difficulty, pray for one another, rejoice together in blessings received or reach out to the straying and point them to the Savior.

Think of the reason we do so: God's love for you and for them. Be motivated and energized to serve with gladness.

Our failures call for humility. God's goodness prompts service. As I mentioned before, it is a lifelong process. Keep growing in God's wisdom. Live in humility and service. God bless you each day as you follow him!