**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“A Harvest of Righteousness”**

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James 3:13-4:10

The book of James is a lot like the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Its primary concern is with helping people to live “the good life.” James has twelve sections of advice to the Christian. As such, there is quite a bit of law in James, and the Gospel can be hard to find.

Our section from James for today deals with wisdom, obviously a common topic in wisdom literature. James presents two kinds of wisdom: earthly wisdom and wisdom from above. Wisdom from above is, of course, the wisdom that we ought to be seeking after. The Wisdom from below, earthly wisdom, is what we are to avoid.

James uses a popular metaphor to compare the two: seed and crops. It is as if each type of wisdom is a seed that produces its own fruit. Earthly wisdom produces bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, and boasting. The wisdom from above, however, produces peace, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, impartiality, and sincerity. You would think that, given the choice between the two of them, the choice is obvious, right? Obviously, we would all prefer the wisdom from above.

Unfortunately, too often we seek after the wisdom of this world instead of the wisdom from above. The wisdom of this world, much like the fruit in the Garden of Eden, is pleasing the eye. The wisdom of this world will help you get ahead in life; it will help your bank account and you in your career. The wisdom of this world will help you in lots of ways because it’s all about you.

The wisdom of this world wants you to focus on yourself. It wants you to focus on what you want above all else. That’s why it produces the fruit that it produces—Jealousy. When you spend all your time worrying about yourself, you start to notice all the things you don’t have but others do. The wisdom of this world will turn you completely inward, thinking only about yourself and everything you do or do not have.

Selfish ambition is a natural consequence of this. There isn’t anything wrong with a healthy level of ambition, but selfish ambition has you constantly seeking to be or appear greater in the world at the sake of anyone else. Undercutting your co-workers, making them look bad, whether justifiably or not. It’s not only in the workplace among adults, but selfish ambition is also rampant among children as well; kids tearing each other down in order to make themselves seem better.

Finally, the wisdom of this world wants you to boast. It would have you look at everything you have, your job, your family, your car, your cabin, your condo, and the wisdom of this world will tell you to boast. The wisdom of this world tells you that you did it all on your own. The wisdom of this world has created a world obsessed with pride; pride in yourself and pride in what you have accomplished.

James goes so far as to describe the wisdom of this world as demonic. The devil and his associates would like nothing more than for you to focus on yourself. The wisdom of this world is all about you.

The wisdom from above is quite different. Instead of having you focus on yourself, it would have you focus on your neighbor. The wisdom from above produces fruit quite different than the wisdom from below. The wisdom from above is Christ, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. The wisdom of this world has become twisted and deformed by sin. Christ is sinless, He is perfect, He is True Wisdom. He has come down from above to produce good fruit in each of us.

A life lived in Christ produces peace. All things are reconciled in Christ. If you have the spirit of Christ, you will seek reconciliation and forgiveness with those that you have sinned against. Reconciliation is the maker of a true Christian community, a community of people who are willing to set aside their pride for the sake of another.

The wisdom from above opens one up to reason. Insecurity shuts one off from reason, insecurity shuts down conversation. It doesn’t allow for other viewpoints to be heard because it is afraid of being challenged. Just turn on the any news station and you will see and hear many insecure people who are terrified of reason. They live in a world of groupthink where there is no reason for reason. The wisdom from above allows Christians to hear other people’s arguments and not over-react; it allows us to approach the world from a reasonable point of view.

The world doesn’t know anything about mercy. It goes for the kill, for the throat. Much of the world and many of the people around us live in a zero-sum world. You have to fail so that I can succeed. Mercy is the opposite; mercy elevates the weak above the mighty. Mercy is much like grace; it gives help to the needy even though they don’t deserve it. Christians are merciful because Christ was merciful to us.

The wisdom from above teaches us to be impartial, not favoring one person over another. Christ Himself was impartial. He died to take away all people’s sins, not just the sins of believers, but all people. He didn’t choose the rich over the poor, He forgave all people.

Lastly, the wisdom from above teaches us to be sincere. It frees us up to be sincere, a people of the truth. The world is full of fake people doing things just to try and earn someone else’s favor. There is always something in it for them. A tax deduction, a line on their resume, a plaque, a favorable glance from their boss or the pretty girl across the room, there is always something in it for them. Christians are free to be a sincere people, doing things for their own sake, instead of an ulterior motive.

Our lives are only so long, our fields are only so big. What kind of seed will you plant? Will you turn to Christ and rely on the wisdom from above, or will you turn to the wisdom of this world? If you turn to Christ, your life may be difficult: your wallet may be tighter than expected, your house might be smaller, your influence might be weaker, and you may not leave your mark on this world.

But if you rely on the wisdom from above, I promise you that you will be rewarded. If you rely on the wisdom from above, your community will be rewarded. If you rely on the wisdom from above, this church will be rewarded.

Those who plant the seeds of true wisdom will reap a harvest of righteousness. Turn to Christ, and His righteousness will be given to you. His good works will be yours. Here is the good news: in your baptisms, the seeds of wisdom have been planted in you. Christ is yours, and you are Christ’s. Your sins are gone; His righteousness is yours. Put your faith in Him and Him alone, and He will work good works through you. Trust in His wisdom, and you will be wise. Your wisdom won’t come from your genetics or a college degree, it won’t come from hard work. Your wisdom, true wisdom, will come from Christ and Christ alone.