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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 18, 2016
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Proverbs 16:1-9, Luke 10:38-42

Hymns: 16; 366:1-5; 305:1-4; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: James 3:13-18

Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Is wisdom a relative thing? --

It is not often thought of as being relative. Wisdom is usually seen in a more objective manner; that it is an attribute or quality that some people possess and others don't. I think we all know people that everyone agrees are very intelligent, possessing a broad base

of knowledge, or even a highly specialized accumulation of knowledge in a certain field, and yet they don't seem to know what to do with that knowledge. They aren't ignorant. Far from it; they are actually very well informed, but it seems they don't know what to do with that knowledge. That is when one is left with the word foolishness. We might be too polite to use that word. We might say that an intelligent individual simply isn't practical. Some might go on to say "Book smart, but not street smart."

We all know that kind of distinction between intelligence, or knowledge, and wisdom. What I started out asking was can wisdom be relative. Are some individuals are very wise by one standard, and yet foolish by another? Then who's to say who is wise and who is foolish?

The world can be very quick to describe confessional Christians who adhere to the Word of God as being very foolish, concluding that Christians really don't have a clue about life. The Scriptures make a very different assessment. So today let us learn from the Spirit about --

THEME: Following Wisdom for Life.

The Spirit reveals very quickly --

I. The Selfishness of Worldly Wisdom.

The world is not so quick to admit what the Lord sees in the heart of man.

James 3:14-16 "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there."

The world is wise in the ways of the world. The world claims to possess even godly wisdom and altruistic behavior. The world claims that they can "**do the most good**" without any self-serving motivation being involved. But what does one see in the world? Exactly what the Apostle James points out: bitter envy and self-seeking. These fleshly qualities are even promoted by politicians as

they draw sharp distinctions between classes, and promote class envy and discontentment, what some call “class warfare.” The idea that we live in the land of opportunity and if you work hard you will succeed, and become wealthy is countered by the suggestion that those who do wealthy are evil and should have their wealth taken away from them and redistributed to others. Bitter envy and selfishness are way too evident in our society among rich and poor alike.

An idea was promoted in a movie a few years that is still repeated by economic commentators who promote a free market economy that is “Greed is good.” “Greed is good” was what hurt so many people back in 2008 when people were writing bad mortgages and then pedaling them as sound investments. So when the world makes claims of wisdom, we need to remember that true wisdom does not reveal itself with “bitter envy and self-seeking.” What comes from all this worldly wisdom is confusion, confusion about what is good and what is evil, confusion about the meaning of life; and most tragic of all, confusion concerning the way to everlasting life.

That kind of wisdom does not come down from above but has its source with the world and the devil and evil that flows from the heart of man. Those who make claims to godly wisdom and yet encourage such envy and self-seeking are boasting, boasting of their own fine deeds that mean nothing, while they also boast of their great wisdom in accumulating the wealth of this age.

Jesus characterized such earthly wealth as the treasures that “**moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal**” (Matthew 6:19). Such treasures are unreliable and fade away, and cannot bring true life to anyone. Instead of bringing true and certain direction to one’s life they bring confusion and temptation to every form of evil.

Paul warned of this in his first epistle to Timothy.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in

their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Envy and greed and covetousness are not good. They do not flow from wisdom, and such confusion brings a tragic end.

The Spirit directs us to --

II. The Meekness of Heavenly Wisdom.

James 3:14, 17-18 “Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. ... ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

How is true wisdom different? The apostle exhorts those who are wise to show their wisdom by their good conduct. It is not simply that they do good things for others, but that these good things be done with meekness. This isn't promoting false humility. The apostle says this is the meekness of wisdom. What does that mean?

It must start with an understanding of the gospel, and the meekness of Jesus. We read in --

1 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

We often site this Scripture in the Christmas season, when we talk about Jesus' humble birth. He left the glory of heaven and took on our flesh and blood and was born in humble circumstances, humble even by man's standards. All that is true but only scratches the surface of the meekness of our Lord. He not only lived a lowly and humble life but having set aside the use of His divine attributes to make His life easy, He placed Himself under the law. He fulfilled the law perfectly for us, and yet He “**bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed**” (1 Peter 2:24).

This is the meekness of wisdom. This is the wisdom of God for us and our salvation. This is the wisdom which the Holy Spirit instills in our hearts and minds that we might follow in Jesus' footsteps. This is the wisdom the world calls the foolishness of the cross. **This foolishness of God is wiser than men. This weakness of God is stronger than men** (1 Corinthians 1:25). This is the wisdom that empowers us to live to God' glory and not our own glory. **"To those who are called ... Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God"** (1 Corinthians 1:24).

What we learn from our text is that this wisdom brings the blessing of God into our lives. I suppose one might say this is the blessing of Christian character. **"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy"** (v.17). All this does not come from within us but from the Lord. It is the Lord that imbues us with these attributes of wisdom that we see also in Christ Jesus. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ these are the characteristics that permeate our soul, that permeate our entire being as we are new creatures in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we still struggle with our sinful flesh. All too often we still behave selfishly. We still fall victim to that green monster of envy and covetousness. However, as we recognize these sins we repent, seeking forgiveness and the power of God to turn away from all that is of the world, holding onto that wisdom which is from above. This wisdom that is from God is life. It is life for us now during our earthly sojourn, and the assurance of everlasting life with the Lord in heaven.

The result of this wonder of heavenly wisdom is peace. **"The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace"** (v.18). As we live in this wisdom and share this wisdom with our fellow man, and especially with our fellow Christians, we reap the fruit of wisdom which is peace. Of course it starts with the peace which we have with God that comes to us from God. This is the peace that fills our hearts so that we are empowered to live in peace even in face of trials and tribulations and confrontations with the world. The world cannot rob us of this peace. All of the harmony that we know, the willingness to yield to others in their desires or

their ideas, all of this is a fruit of the righteousness that comes to us from God. It is a product of the wisdom that the Spirit has given us. It is a blessing of God for us in our lives, as well as for those around us in life. As we continue down the path of life and grow in faith, and grow in the Word these fruits of righteousness will increase.

Finally, as our earthly sojourn draws to its end even then we shall know peace.

Wisdom for life! Don't be deceived by worldly wisdom with all its promises of fame and fortune and luxurious living. Know the wisdom that truly is the wisdom of life that brings life to our souls, that enriches our lives with heavenly peace and harmony, and that delivers us to everlasting life with God in heaven above. This is the one thing needful that shall not be taken away from us (Luke 10:42).

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)