

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Holy Wisdom

### Sermon Reflection Notes

James continues to call his congregation (us) toward reflection on what it means to be a mature Christian – what it means to be wise. This text is a reminder that as baptized Christians, conversion, change, is not a one-time thing, but rather, a life-long process that requires practice and self-reflection. It also includes ambiguity and failure and the willingness to start over again.

Last week, we focused on the words we use to create. We recognized and acknowledged that our words have power, and that power must be used intentionally to create hope, love, community, faith, peace. This week, James calls our attention to wisdom, suggesting that not all wisdom is created equal. He states that there is wisdom from God that comes down from above and wisdom from the world that springs up from “unspiritual, devilish” sources. Who, then, is wise? Where does wisdom reside? What is our criteria for wisdom?

Rev. Beaton said this week that wisdom, like our words, takes practice; it needs direction, to be cultivated. For James, holy wisdom was discerned by examining its fruits. He says earthly wisdom is bitter envy and selfish ambition, which leads directly to disorder and wickedness. The distinction is there: bitter envy or bitter zeal. Bitter passion. Passion itself is not the problem. It’s what we do with passion that can lead to bitterness. Anger is passion that can be directed toward the vices of wrath and vengeance...or it can be directed towards the virtues of justice and righteousness.

James provides us with words to describe wisdom from above. But how often do we look to our leaders, or even ourselves, to fit his description: pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

Wisdom then, produces peace. “‘Peace, peace,’ they say, ‘when there is no peace.’” Jeremiah called out, as we call out today. In a world filled with bitter envy, bitter passions, we are called to cultivate wisdom, to cultivate gentleness, to cultivate peace. Let us begin by throwing open the doors of our lives, seeking wisdom to delight in, in the hope that it will be contagious and spread throughout the world.

### Scripture

*James 3:13- 4:3, 7-8a (NRSVUE)*

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be arrogant and lie about the truth. <sup>15</sup>This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup>For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

<sup>1</sup> Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

## Discussion Questions

1. Brainstorm historical/contemporary figures you would consider to be wise.
  - What qualities do the people on this list have in common?
  - Does this list fit your definition of “being wise” or “wisdom”?
  - Is anything missing? Anything on the list that shouldn’t be?
  - Is this list a “working definition” of wisdom we can agree on for today?
2. Are wisdom and intelligence the same thing? Can one exist without the other? Are they mutually exclusive? Explain.
3. James’s words suggest that wisdom leads to peacemaking. Rev. Beaton mentioned several things that we don’t often hear leaders, or even ourselves, say, like “I might be wrong” or “You made a good point. I yield to what you have to say.”
  - What is the difference between “keeping the peace” and “cultivating peace?”
  - What are the words, the practices, that we can cultivate in our own lives to create peace both for ourselves and others?
4. Last week, we were thinking about speaking and acting like a “mature” Christian. What role does wisdom play in our journey toward maturity as Christians?

## Closing Prayer

Truth-telling, wind-blowing, life-giving Spirit of God – you persist in inviting us to be whole, to be all that you dream for us to be, and you never give up on us. And so this day, we begin again to imagine our lives without attempts to control others, without hurt and anger, without an insistence on always “being right.” Help us to be seekers of wisdom – living lives filled with humility and grace, always working to cultivate peace. We pray always in the name of Jesus the Christ, whose wisdom we are called to follow. Amen.

*“In the midst of a world crying out for peace, be one of the peacemakers.”*