

The 17th Sunday after Pentecost
September 19th, 2021

“Wisdom and grace from above!”
(James 3:17)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this 17th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading – James 3:17.

“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.

Here ends our text.

I. What the Wisdom from above is

One has to admire some of the technological advances that we are seeing in our times. Much wisdom went into the planning of the first all-civilian orbital flight by Space-X. Yes, there were no astronauts onboard the three-day flight that circled the earth higher than the space station, higher than any human had gone since the Apollo moon program ended in 1972 – just 4 civilians, four amateurs on an outer space ride, travelling 22 times the speed of sound. All was controlled by in-flight guidance systems and by professionals from the ground.

And yesterday, the Inspiration4 crew parachuted safely into the ocean and were picked up by the recovery ship. The outside of the capsule was visibly scorched, having endured temperatures of 3500 degrees Fahrenheit, but the passengers were kept cool inside. And their mission also raised \$160 million dollars for cancer research for St. Jude Hospital, a noble cause.

A lot of testing the Space-X site in the Rio Grande Valley made went into this successful flight. Much wisdom and planning by Elon Musk and company enabled these four travelers to enjoy an amazing 3-day view of planet earth from above. Are you interested in hopping on the next 3-day space cruise?

Well, as amazing as this all sounds, you don't have to leave earth to have and see the greatest wisdom of all. No, I'm not talking about Cadillac's hands-free driving called the Super Cruise. I'm talking about the Wisdom from above that comes to each of us this morning wherever we hear and read God's word. For God's word is the wisdom which all people need for our daily journey on this planet. Without God's wisdom, there is no flight to heaven when this earthly journey ends.

The civilian crew of Inspiration4 actually got an amazing glimpse of the craftsmanship of He who is called Wisdom Himself in Proverbs 8. For Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the Wisdom of God.

“but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (Colossians 1:23-24)

And so Christ calls Himself Wisdom as He speaks to us in Proverbs 8.

**“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion.”
(v.12)**

**“By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles,
All the judges of the earth.” (15,16)** And, the richest billionares...

**“Riches and honor are with me, Enduring riches and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, And my revenue than choice
silver. I traverse the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice,”
(v.18-20)** (Wisdom holds the riches that are needed for everlasting righteousness in heaven)

**“I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there
was ever an earth.” (v.23)**

**“When He (God the Father) established the clouds above, When He
strengthened the fountains of the deep, When He assigned to the sea its limit,
So that the waters would not transgress His command, When He marked out
the foundations of the earth, Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman;
And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His
inhabited world, And my delight was with the sons of men.” (v.28-31)**

Yes, whether the four civilians of Inspiration4 realized it or not, they were seeing the inspired work of the Master Creator, Wisdom Himself, Jesus Christ.

II. What wars against the Wisdom from above

Yes, Jesus' delight was in the sons of men. He made the world perfect, without cancer, without viruses, but His creation turned on Him and sin entered the world. The devil tempted man with these words.

“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)

And since man's fall, there is a war that wages against the Wisdom from above. Our epistle reading describes it clearly.

“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.” (James 3:14-16)

James of course is writing to Christians. He began chapter three with the address “My brothers”. And last week we heard how Christians are in a continual battle trying to control the smallest of the bodily members, the tongue. Blessing and cursing come from the same tongue? May it never be so! Says James (v10)

He continues to describe the battle against our new spirit in Christ that is waged by our Old Adam and the earthly, sensual, demonic world. The world's “wisdom” is envious and self-seeking. Adam was envious of God and thought only of himself that he could be like God. Because of sin, death entered the world so that the crown of God's creation would not live forever but was cursed to die. So James states the inevitability that awaits each of us, paupers and billionaires alike.

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14)

Contentions that arise between Christians are because of self-seeking. James continues in chapter 4 of our epistle, **“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.”**

Fighting among church members, in families, between spouses, is a result of following the worldly wisdom of putting oneself first and not loving another as oneself.

The prayer life with God of a self-seeking person also suffers, because one asks God for things that are harmful and of the world. James says, **“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** (James 4:3-4)

III. What the Wisdom from above yearns for jealously and graciously gives

Where man’s sinful wisdom has always failed, God’s Wisdom is steadfast and gracious. That is good news for each of us. As great as our sins are God’s grace is greater.

““The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:5-6)

God yearned for us with such great love that He sent His Son from above, Wisdom from above, to become true Man. And we saw in Him what true Wisdom is as James says in our Epistle reading.

“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.”

Jesus was not self-seeking but self-giving. He yielded and endured our punishment for our sins by His passion and death. He did so because He is full of mercy and compassion. He gave His life for all people, without partiality. He wants all men to be saved. So Paul tells us in Romans 5:20-21.

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Wisdom is first pure. It is pure in its love for us. We can absolutely count on God’s wisdom that created the world perfect and through the sacrifice of Jesus recreates a new man in us through faith. And the believer in Christ is graciously given Wisdom’s righteousness and purity. In baptism our sins are washed away and we

stand pure in the eyes of God. We eat and drink Christ's very body and blood for our forgiveness that He mercifully gave for us. So James says in the opening chapter, **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."**

We receive Christ's perfect gift of love in the Lord's Supper this morning which forgives all our self-seeking, envy and contentiousness. And strengthens our hearts to follow Jesus in peace, gentleness and mercy towards others.

And that's our view from above. For when we receive Christ's wisdom, we see the world with eyes of mercy and compassion as He sees it. Thanks be to God that He sought us with His mercy. Yes, Jesus touched down from His flight from heaven, incarnate of the Virgin Mary to be the Wisdom of love that the sinful world needed. Thanks be to God that His wisdom contains both Law and Gospel to convict our hearts, humble us, and graciously forgive us.

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10)

He will lift you up from the depth of your sins. He will lift you up and give you peace, joy, and strength to serve Him. He will lift you up on the last day and you will literally float up with Him in the clouds to live with Him in righteousness and purity forever in heaven.

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)