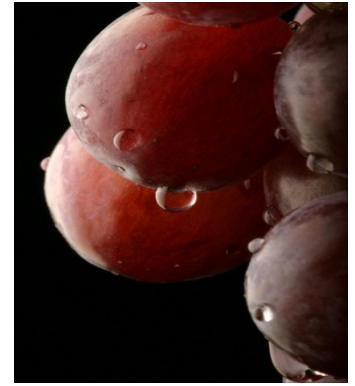


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
October 4, 2009 Pentecost 18 James 3:13-18



Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peace-makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Terry Herbert is two years younger than I am. He has one of those metal detectors – where you walk – and go back and forth. You wear these little earphones – and it makes this noise when it goes over something metal. Well, Terry was walking through a freshly plowed field that belonged to his friend on July 5th when his metal detector went nuts! Terry found all kinds of gold and silver – 1,345 items – pieces of weapons – plus 56 lumps of earth – containing more treasures. There are about 11 pounds of gold – worth more than \$1,000 per ounce – not to mention it’s historical value! Terry was so excited he said the little hairs on the back of his neck stood up! He remains so excited – he said he actually dreams about gold! What do you think? In your heart of hearts – what do you think? *Must be nice!* Must be nice to stumble through the clods of a freshly plowed field and stumble upon a king’s ransom! *Must be nice* – to suddenly have millions of dollars of gold and silver. Do you honestly think that if you just had lots and lots of money – then all your troubles – or at least most of your troubles would all go away? It’s easy to get caught up in the pursuit of things and stuff – to get up early and stay up late – trying to scratch out a living – so you can buy that big screen – 1.2 inch thick HD TV – the recliner with the place in the arm rest to keep your beverage cold – the theatre seating and surround sound – the thick steak and the fine clothes – the fast car that you can skid on the big wet parking lot. All that stuff sounds nice. But it’s not what really matters. What matters is that Jesus died on the cross to wash away all your sins – so Heaven is your forever home!

How Wise Are You?

- 1. Do you harbor envy and ambition?**
- 2. Are you planting peace?**

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on – was written down by James. There are a couple of James in the Bible. There is James – as in James and John – the sons of Zebedee – the fishermen who fished with Peter and Andrew. This is not the James who wrote the letter of James. There is another disciple named James – sometimes called James the Less. His mom was one of the ladies who was there when Jesus died on the cross – then went to Jesus’ tomb that first Easter morning at dawn – to hear the angels say, **“He is not here. He is risen from the dead – just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you!”** That’s not the James who wrote the letter of James either. This James would be the half-brother of

Jesus. You can read about him in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13. That's where Jesus **went to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.** "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, **"Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."** Matthew 13:54 to 57 James was kind of like the first Synod President in Jerusalem – leading the Church by his humble gentle quiet example. Because James was so humble and faithful – he was hated by the enemies of the Gospel. The Lord used the Roman Governor Festus to keep James physically safe. The day came when in A.D. 62 Festus died. Now it was time for James to come home to heaven. A High Priest named Annus II and the Sanhedrin had James stoned to death. The new Roman governor Albinus – was so outraged he had Annus deposed from being High Priest. His earthly glory ended – even as James eternal rest began!

The message that the Holy Spirit breathed into James is exceedingly practical. It's about fruits of faith. Jesus loved us. He chose us before the foundation of the world. He was born into this sin infected world to save us. He died and rose again to wash away our guilty stains. Now – we show our thankfulness to Jesus by how we live! Remember last Sunday? **Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**" Good intentions don't cut the mustard. We need to practice what we preach. People like Jean Garofalo say the problem with anti-abortion people is they say you dasn't get an abortion. Then we don't lift a finger to help the mommy and the baby! That must not be true. We need to put our faith into practice in the most practical and concrete ways. Simon Peter wrote, **"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."** 1 Peter 2:11-13 We need to live our faith in such a way – it is a powerful preachment of the Gospel to the people all around us – to silence even put to shame those who try to criticize the Gospel!

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. This is the time of year that Forbes Magazine publishes the list of the 400 richest people in the United States. Mr. Gates is still on top – but this year he lost 7 billion this year. Mr. Buffett's stocks lost 20%--so he has only 40 billion dollars. The Waltons are still doing well – around 20 billion dollars each. The MGM Mirage in Vegas and Enterprise Rent-a-car aren't doing as well and aren't worth as much as they used to be. Again billions less than they used to be. So what would you do – to get ahead? Do we harbor bitter envy? Do you have a relative – a brother or sister that is doing very well – and never misses a chance to flaunt it? Does everything about their lifestyle bother us? They have a new car and we have a beater. They are buying new clothes – and we are mending ours? They are remodeling and we are struggling to make our mortgage payments? They are going out to eat and we are buying generic oatmeal? They are going on trips and vacations and we are getting furloughed or a pay cut? Bitter envy can lead to selfish ambition. What are we willing to do to get more money? Lie a little? Cheat a little? See some money lying around – and putting it in your pocket – after a quick look all around – to be sure no one was watching? Selfish ambition in your heart – can lead to a Donald Trump attitude that uses people and then throws them away. What does he like to say? "It's nothing personal – just business!" This world seems to reward those who are cut throat – aggressive – survivors!

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Considerate. That's being thoughtful – all the time. It's thinking about how our words and actions might cause someone else pain or hurt or embarrassment. For a husband to love his wife like Christ loved the Church means to be considerate. Submissive is not a popular word in our world or our culture. Submissive is the attitude of a servant – a slave. Again – this world doesn't put much stock in that. This world looks up to the people who push and shove their way to the front. This world looks up to the football player that hits the other guy so hard they don't get back up. This world looks up to the hockey player – the enforcer – the guy that hammers someone into the side boards so hard that when they back off – the other guy slumps to the ice. Again – remember Jesus' powerful example – the reading from Isaiah? **"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame."** Remember that? Jesus endured all that – not because he was weak – but because he was so strong. Jesus endured all that – because his love for you is that strong! Only Jesus can make us so strong we can literally turn the other cheek – when other people strike out at us. Only Jesus can make us so strong we can be yelled at – and not yell back – be cursed – and not curse back – threatened – without threatening back! Only Jesus can make us so strong – we can be the one to wash feet – like Jesus did. **Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.** Matthew 20:26,27

Peace-makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. There is no lack of violence in our world. A police officer was shot in the elbow this week in Milwaukee – executing a search warrant. He was visited in the hospital by the mayor who himself was pounded on – when he took his grandchildren to the state fair. A young man was beaten with boards from the railroad and kicked to death on his way home from school in Chicago and he was only 16. The attack was caught on surveillance cameras – and somebody there held up their cell phone to film it – rather than fall on him and cover him with their own body – risking the blows and the harm themselves – to try and save him. The Iranians shot off three test missiles as they kick the can farther down the street toward a nuclear weapon to shoot at Israel or us. And the FBI has arrested a bunch of people who were buying beauty shop supplies – allegedly to blow up in an underground parking lot – to cause a huge building full of people to collapse. There is plenty of violence. Where are **the peace-makers who sow in peace – in order to harvest righteousness?** We need to sow peace in our own homes first. That begins when people who come to Church to hear God's Word – not only hear it – but put it into practice in concrete ways. Peace in our homes. Children – little people – not terrible twos – but little people who share and cooperate! It means brothers and sisters – not doing whatever they can to irritate each other but to help and encourage each other. Husbands – Fathers – teach their children about peace – by being kind to their wife – the mother of their children. Children need to see their father not just saying mushy stuff – not just buying roses by the dozen when they have been unkind. But husbands helping their wife do the difficult and unpleasant jobs around the home. What a blessing when children see their father – armed with power tools and hand tools – making repairs and improvements around the house – for a wife who does not nag and pester them until they become angry – throw the remote control – do the repairs and then literally shout, "Are you happy now?!" Peace makers do things that are small and thoughtful – because they love Jesus and because they love their spouse.

Blessed are the peace makers – planting the seeds of peace – so that there might be an abundant harvest of righteousness – for their children and grandchildren! I have been told by my loved ones--a couple of times – that I talk about death a lot. That’s probably true. It’s an occupational hazard – because the end game of preaching and teaching the Gospel is – to be ready to die. Know the Gospel – so that whenever you die – you are ready to meet Jesus. And so I have long been fascinated with the very last thing people say before they die. Books have been written about the final words of people who were dying. I have read more than once that General John Sedgwick – a Union Army Commander – on the front line – was looking at Confederate soldiers shooting at him. His final words were, “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist...” That was that! John Maynard Keynes – a person who wrote a lot about governments intervening when there is economic trouble said, “I wish I had drunk more champagne.” I think there’s something to that. To celebrate the little blessings that Jesus has given all of us. To recognize and appreciate and celebrate the countless things we take for granted and even complain about. Then there’s the 15 year old girl whose last word was “Um...” “Um?” The meaningless filler of time and space – “Um?” I’m going to think of that – the next time I’m listening to someone and they keep saying, “Um!” When I was at the Seminary – during lunchtime public speaking – if you said, “Um!” Everyone in the dining hall would in unison yell “Um!” Back at you! What we say and how we say it needs to plant peace. We need to think first – think hard – be very very careful what we say and how we say it – so it gives glory to Jesus – until we see the Prince of Peace face to face! Amen!

