**St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Perth**

**Sunday, September 22nd, 2024**

**Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**The Wisdom of the Lord**

**Proper 20**

**James 3:13-18**

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Praise the name of the LORD.
**Blessed be the name of the LORD!**

From the rising of the sun to its setting, praise the name of the LORD.
**We will bless God’s holy name now and evermore.**

The glory of the Lord is high above the heavens,

but God raises up the poor and needy on the earth.
**So we will sing God’s praise.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

God our Creator,

You sustain your creation

as the source of life for every precious thing.

You have given us more than we could ever earn or deserve,

and so we offer you our love and loyalty,

for without you, we would not be.

Receive our worship this day, O God.

Speak to us in the sounds and silence of this hour,

and amaze us

with your promise of new life revealed in Jesus Christ,

and your power at work in us and among us through the Spirit.

**Amen.**

**Children’s Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Generous God,**

**You have enriched us with life worth living,**

**but we confess we often squander your good gifts.**

**We have wasted our time and energy,**

**but held tightly to things we think we need.**

**Forgive our foolish priorities**

**and those times we overlooked the needs of others.**

**Inspire us to live more generously,**

**trusting your goodness to sustain us always.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have squandered God’s good gifts,

it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God’s love in Jesus Christ.

Trust the mercy of God, and be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,**

**Forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn #452: “Jesus, Stand Among Us”**

Jesus, stand among us in your risen power;
let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.

Breathe the Holy Spirit into every heart;
bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart.

Thus with quickened footsteps we pursue our way,
watching for the dawning of eternal day.

**Responsive Reading**

**Psalm 119: 9-16**

**9**How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

**10With my whole heart I seek you;**

**let me not wander from your commandments!**

**11I have stored up your word in my heart,**

**that I might not sin against you.**

**12**Blessed are you, O Lord;

teach me your statutes!

**13With my lips I declare**

**all the rules of your mouth.**

**14**In the way of your testimonies I delight

as much as in all riches.

**15I will meditate on your precepts**

**and fix my eyes on your ways.**

**16I will delight in your statutes;**

**I will not forget your word.**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “There Comes a Time”**

**Prayer for illumination**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Scripture**

**James 3:13-18**

**13Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

**Sermon**

We have been going through the book of James for the last few weeks. A book that was written to those who claimed to be followers of Christ, a way for them to examine their own faith against what true faith in the Lord should look like in this world. You could say that the book of James is, ‘where the rubber meets the road’ in our lives.

If you have spent any time in Church or around Christians you have likely heard the phrase, ‘Be in the world, not of the world’ at least a few times. What makes this phrase so interesting is that it can have such varied influence on the lives of those who claim Christianity, in some it creates outcasts who isolate themselves from the world, in others it creates people who embrace the world, and in a sense lose God. However, when it is understood and applied properly it explains the tension between Christian living and the world we live in every day.

The truth is that we live in a world that is moving further and further from the values that the Scriptures teach, and we are called in those same Scriptures to uphold the Word of God even as the world moves away from them. This is because even though we are living here on earth we are citizens of Heaven. We are pilgrims, or sojourners, aliens in this world.

Christians are called to see this time on earth a voyage that we must go on while we move towards our true home, heaven and the kingdom of the Lord. So, while we live in this world now, we should not become overly attached to it, and its ways. We are called to distinguish ourselves from this world, in the way we act, the words we choose and in the way we think. Which is what James is talking about today, the wisdom of the Lord.

If you claim to be a follower of Christ, the Bible says that is the ‘wisdom of God’, and yet if you are not letting your life be led by the wisdom of God’s words, His Scriptures, then you need to ask yourself some very hard questions about the reality of your relationship with the Lord.

Paul said it well in the book of Romans.

**Romans 12:2**

**2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

The truth is that our thinking and our wisdom has been damaged by the fall and is constantly under the influence of our sinful nature. Jesus came to redeem us and bring us back to the wisdom of God. When we allow him to do that, we see that the morals, values and ethics that are taught in the Scriptures are often separate from the ways of the world, and at many times in direct opposition to what the world teaches. God calls for his people to have different values, morals and ethics. God calls for his people to live their lives differently, to act, speak and think differently from those of the world, and James is reminding us that Gods way is the correct way.

In the Scripture we are looking at today, James is painting a picture for us of the contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. He is trying to make it clear that there is a significant difference between the ways of the world and the ways of God in our lives.

The way we receive and apply Godly wisdom and worldly wisdom determines the way we live. Who and what we worship influences every aspect of our lives, especially the way we think, act and speak. This is why we find there is so much contrast in the lives of true Christians and the world, they are incompatible ideas, living out incompatible ideals.

The world and the church of Jesus Christ are two entirely different and utterly contrary stories about the nature of human beings, the meaning of life in this world, what truth and goodness mean and ultimately what the destiny of every human soul will be.

So, James decides to dive into these differences in the most difficult way possible.

**James 3:13**

**13Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom**

So, who is wise among you? What is your gut reaction when you are asked that question? Who is the wise person that you would turn to if you had a simple question? Would it be one of the fine silver haired folks that are seated in the pews, or would it be someone else? It is true that age and experience can produce wisdom, but there are millions of elderly non-believers and false believers out there that prove not everyone gets wisdom with age.

There are plenty of people who live their entire lives foolishly, in fact it has become more common in recent years. People who never seem to learn, or people who choose just to ignore the warning signs they are given.

Could you turn to the person with the highest level of education for their wisdom? Someone with multiple degrees, maybe even a doctorate degree? While education can facilitate wisdom, it cannot create wisdom, the foolishness we are seeing in the educational institutions today proves that. People are coming out of higher education not only lacking wisdom but lacking the tools to discover it in their lives, taught to simply obey what the media teaches them as they conform to the ways of this world. This is why we have so many highly educated people, who will completely ignore the truths they discover in the world around them, just so they can deny the truth of God in this world.

So how are we to get wisdom if we cannot turn to the elderly or the educated? We need to start by understanding what wisdom is; wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and follow the best course of action based upon knowledge and understanding. Wisdom is about taking life experience, advice and learning, and then applying all of that knowledge in the everyday decision we make in this world. Wisdom is applying the truth we know in our lives each and every day, that is the wise person, and James is going to show us the difference between someone whose wisdom comes from the world and someone whose wisdom comes from the Lord.

**James 3:14-16**

**14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.**

James is summarizing the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a book that contrasts the life of wisdom with the life of foolishness. And here he clearly identifies the source of living foolishly; earthy, unspiritual and demonic thinking and living.

What is earthly, unspiritual, demonic thinking? It is a way of thinking that is limited to this world. It is thinking that is limited to things that man can theorize, discover and accomplish by himself. It has no place for God or the things of God. It has no place for truth or illumination. It is a closed system of man’s own creation.

As James notes it is a system that is chosen by those who are filled with pride, selfish ambition, arrogance and self-interest. It is the core behind the ‘You only live once’ movement, behind a society that says, ‘do your own thing’, ‘you be you’, ‘have it your way’ and ‘always look out for number one.’ It is also the wisdom that prevails in philosophy, education, politics, economics, sociology, psychology and every other aspect and dimension of our modern life.

Simply put, a foolish person values their own knowledge, values, morals, ethics, and opinions than God’s! They reject the idea that it is their own pride or that the devil could be influencing their lives or limiting their wisdom. They reject the Biblical truth of Jerimiah.

**Jerimiah 17:9**

**The heart is deceitful above all things,**

**and desperately sick;**

**who can understand it?**

And when a person will not accept the truth their heart can lead them astray, they will find every possible way to not believe in the truth of the Scripture. They will never seek out the wisdom of the Lord in prayer. They will not let the Holy Spirit into their lives to change their way of thinking. They will not develop a true relationship with the Lord, one in which they are transformed.

Often when a professing Christian says, ‘I know the Bible says, but…’, they are no different than the atheist. A non-Christian blatantly ignores the Scripture, a fool knows what the Scripture says and chooses to ignore it because of their own personal wisdom, worldly wisdom that comes from pride, arrogance and satanic influence.

Perhaps one of the most interesting facts about the life of a fool is that they are often completely unaware of their foolishness. So, James tries to open their eyes to the truth, if you live a life filled with jealousy and selfishness, quit lying to yourself, you are not living your life according to the wisdom of God, you are living your life according to the wisdom of this world. Yes, we all experience times of jealousness, envy and selfishness, this is why Jesus came, to save us not only for all eternity, but to save us from our own selfish ideals here on earth. Jesus came to change us from who we are naturally to who he is calling for us to be.

A foolish person lives a life that is dominated by their own self-interest. They live a life where they are always comparing themselves to others. They are always in competition with those around them, always chasing after something new, always trying to, ‘keep up with the joneses.’

James is saying that if your life is filled with envy, you have an issue with God. We need to remember that every good and perfect gift comes from God, and when we are jealous and envious of others, we are actually angry at God for not giving us the same things.

**James 3:16**

**16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.**

The word ‘and’ is there between disorder and vile practice for a very good reason, it is separating two truths. When we seek out the ways of the world over the ways of the Lord our lives will be dominated by instability and sin.

Have you ever heard someone say, ‘I just can’t seem to catch a break’, or ‘I have the worst luck’. People who talk about karma, people who refuse to recognize that the consequences of their sins and evil practices often have negative effects in their lives. People who blame God for what is happening in their lives, even though they never turn to him for wisdom, never obey his Scriptures. Yes, it is true that you can live a very Biblical life and still go through trials, tribulations and temptations, however they are times that we turn to the Lord. They are all consequences to the fall of mankind and meant to bring us closer in our relationship to God. However, when all of the dysfunction in a person’s life is centered around one common denominator, that person, it might be time to recognize where the issue lies.

If you have gotten fired from every job you have ever held – it might not be a bunch of bad co-workers or bad bosses, it could be you. If every relationship you have been in ends up falling apart, it might be your unwise choices in getting onto those relationships, or choices you made in that relationship. If no one seems to get along with you, it is most likely you.

Here is what James is saying, if your life seems chaotic and dominated by the ways of this world, if your life is filled with sin, if your heart is dominated by jealousy and selfishness then you are clearly not getting the wisdom you are choosing to live by from the Lord.

**Proverbs 12:15**

**The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,**

**but a wise man listens to advice.**

The word fool in Proverbs is the word ‘kesil’ and it literally means ‘thickness’ People who are thickheaded and stubborn in their worldly ways and ideals. They refuse to listen to reason and the ways of the Lord.

**Proverbs 18:6**

**6A fool’s lips walk into a fight,**

**and his mouth invites a beating.**

**Proverbs 20:3**

**3It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife,**

**but every fool will be quarreling.**

The fool loves to fight about what they believe is the truth, feeling the need to force it upon everyone else, so that they can feel that they know best.

James is taking the wisdom of the book of Proverbs and teaching the faithful how to apply the wisdom of God to their lives. If our lives are filled with worldly wisdom and worldly ways, we are worldly people and not the people of God that we claim to be. When we allow our own pride, our own deceitful heart to be the guiding light in our lives we are a fool, when we do not place God and his Scriptures first, we are living foolish lives, we are obeying the wisdom from below

and in truth there is no wisdom at all in living that way.

James 3:17-18

**17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

God is the one and only source of true wisdom in this world. The person who has set their mind on the things from above is the one who is living according to the Scriptures. They are people who live lives of ‘good conduct’. People who obey God’s teachings, and it is evident in their lives. People who walk alongside Jesus Christ in their lives, people who walk in Godly wisdom, live a life beyond reproach and they are happy to do so as they are set apart from the world around them.

A true Christian’s life is not marked by joyless obedience, it is marked by a righteous way of living that is attractive to others. It is a life that is filled by the wisdom of God, as James says it is wisdom that is, ‘**first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.’**

Pure – a life that is morally blameless. A life where you live the same way in church as you do out of church. A life where Christ is always first. A life in which there are no hidden things, a life in which there is no shame or embarrassment. Now that does not mean a life without sin, we all fall to sin, but it means that when we do sin, we immediately turn to God and repent seeking God’s forgiveness and help to not sin again.

Peaceable – You are a peacemaker. You do not walk abound angry at the world, angry at others. You are not about arguing, verbal or physical combat, instead you seek out Biblical truth and godly reconciliation.

Gentleness and Open to Reason – You are a humble person. Someone who does not place themselves upon a pedestal. You are meek, not weak. You live a life with a restrained strength, with patience. You know to hold your tongue and not respond emotionally or in haste, but instead gently with love and compassion. As Jesus describes himself, ‘gentle and lowly’.

No one wants to be a fool. Fools live their lives blind to their own foolishness, and when a wise person exposes their foolishness to them with the compassion and love of Christ they often want to repent of their foolishness and seek out the wisdom of the Lord. So how does a fool begin the journey from foolishness into the wisdom of the Lord?

**Proverbs 2:4**

**2 My son, if you receive my words**

**and treasure up my commandments with you,**

**2making your ear attentive to wisdom**

**and inclining your heart to understanding;**

**3yes, if you call out for insight**

**and raise your voice for understanding,**

**4if you seek it like silver**

**and search for it as for hidden treasures,**

**5then you will understand the fear of the Lord**

**and find the knowledge of God.**

We need to seek it out ourselves. We need to turn to the Word of God in our own reading of the Scriptures, in discussion with fellow Christians, in Bible studies and in Sunday sermons, we need to seek it, and when we find it

**Proverbs 4:7-8**

**7The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,**

**and whatever you get, get insight.**

**8Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;**

**she will honor you if you embrace her.**

We need to treasure it. Not just brush it off but value it in our lives. We need to be willing to give up the things that draw us away from it and instead embrace it, value it like a treasure in our lives.

**Psalm 19:7**

**7The law of the Lord is perfect,**

**reviving the soul;**

**the testimony of the Lord is sure,**

**making wise the simple;**

We have to apply it to our lives, moving beyond knowing to doing. We need to devote ourselves to knowing and understanding the Word of God. To taking the knowledge and wisdom we get from the Scriptures and living it out, so that others can discover the truth of God’s Word through us.

**James 1:5-8**

**5If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

We need to turn to God in all things. We need to seek him out in prayer, admit our failings and faults, admit our pride and selfishness and ask for his Holy Spirit to enlighten us in his Word. The same way in which Solomon and David sought out the Lord, humbly on our knees, admitting our weaknesses to the ways of this world and acknowledging His dominion over everything as creator and sustainer. The wisdom that leads to peace and joy is not of this world, it is not natural, it is not inborn, it is not worldly, it is supernatural. It is a gift from God alone, so if you want God’s wisdom you need to ask him for it, you need to pray.

As Christians we need to understand

**Psalm 90:12**

**12 So teach us to number our days**

**that we may get a heart of wisdom.**

Our days are numbered. Our lives are finite. We need to remember this as we struggle along in this world, so that we do not become overly focused on the things here. We need to have an eternal perspective on life.

This means that we look at everything in our life, everything in the light of eternity. We need to be willing to make sacrifices in the here and now, for the sake of the long term. And the only way to do that is to have Jesus Christ in our lives. Without Jesus there is no eternity.

To know and love Jesus Christ is the only way to live eternally. To know and love Jesus Christ as one of his faithful followers, is the only true path to peace and joy in this world and beyond.

James sums this up when he reminds is that ‘**a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.’**

It is a lot of hard work to obey the teachings of the Scripture, it means we will make sacrifices in this world. It means that we may suffer at the hands of others, through persecution or worse. It means that we will be set apart from the world in many ways, but the wisdom of the Lord means that we will also avoid many of the problems that come alongside the ways of this world.

Today I have 2 final teachings from Proverbs I want to share.

**Proverbs 1:7**

**7The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;**

**fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

**Proverbs 13:5**

**15Good sense wins favor,**

**but the way of the treacherous is their ruin.**

So, ask yourself, is it better to fear the Lord and walk in his ways, or live your life foolishly as you walk the path to ruin in this world? Come to Jesus today fully, give up the wisdom of this world, and seek out the wisdom of the Lord in your life.

Let Us Pray,

***May Your Grace Move Our Love***

O sweet Savior Christ,

in your undeserved love for us

you were prepared to suffer the painful death of the cross:

let me not be cold or even lukewarm in my love for you.

Lord help me to face the truth about myself.

Help me to hear my words as others hear them,

to see my face as others see me;

Let me be honest enough to recognize my impatience and conceit;

Let me recognize my anger and selfishness;

Give me sufficient humility to accept my own weakness for what they are.

Give me the grace – at least in your presence – to say. ‘I was wrong – forgive me.’

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

increase in us faith and truth and gentleness

and grant us part and lot among the saints.

*Source: Polycarp*

**Hymn: “Night Song”**

VERSE 1

In the darkness God will keep me He will stay and never sleep

In the darkness God is brighter though the night is long and deep.

CHORUS

All this day Your hand has held me God of Heaven by my side

Thank you Father for your goodness You will hold me through the night.

VERSE 2

In the shadows You are with me and You know my every fear

IN the shadows none can harm me for the mighty God is here. (Chorus)

VERSE 3

So, I find my rest in Jesus He who came to rescue me

Jesus saved me from the darkness I will rise to life with Him. (Chorus)

**Invitation to Offering**

**Offering**

**Offertory Prayer**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn #479: “The Church’s One Foundation”**

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ our Lord;
we are his new creation
by water and the word;
from heaven he came and sought us
that we might ever be
his living servant people,
by his own death set free.

Called forth from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
our charter of salvation,
one Lord, one faith, one birth,
one holy name professing
and at one table fed,
to one hope we are pressing,
by Christ's own Spirit led.

Though with a scornful wonder
the world sees us oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping;
their cry goes up, 'How long?'
But soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

**Pastoral Prayer**

God in whom we live and move and have our being,

each week our prayers join with those of Christians around the world

to seek your healing grace for those in need

and to pray for justice and mercy in your fragile creation.

We thank you for the ways in which your Spirit can surprise us,

bringing healing and hope in situations which cause us to despair.

Encourage us when we feel overwhelmed.

We remember before you today people living with illness and suffering,

for those struggling with disability or waiting for treatment,

and for those who know grief or fear or loneliness

We remember before you people caught up in economic uncertainty,

those worried for the future, or struggling to make ends meet

We remember before you today your whole creation in its increasing vulnerability.

Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love

so that all your creatures may live together in health and wholeness.

As we leave here today, Lord, we pray for your Holy Spirit to be with us

and guide us to walk in Your light and in obedience to Your scripture

so that we may be the salt and light of this world.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our saviour

Who live and reign with You and the Holy Spirit

As the one true living God

Now and forevermore. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the blessing of God,

the giver of every good and perfect gift;

and of Christ, who summons us to service;

and of the Holy Spirit, who inspires generosity and love,

be with us all.