

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 17B (Proper 20B)
September 19, 2021
James 3:13-4:10

Friend of the World or of God?

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

It's often been said, "Be careful who your friends are. Choose your friends wisely. You're known by the company you keep." So as we hear our Lord this day, we consider whether we are friends of the world or friends of God.

Today's Gospel (Mark 9:30-37) tells us that the disciples were arguing about who was greatest. And this right after Jesus had told them that "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And . . . after three days he will rise." (Mark 9:31). They seem not to have heard a word Jesus had said for they were more concerned about themselves, and who was greatest, than they were about Jesus.

But before we think too rashly about the disciples, we need to realize that we are just like them. From the day we were born, we are full of jealousy and selfish ambition. We fight and quarrel with each other, at home, at work, at school, and even in the church. We covet and murder, in thought if not in deed. In short, we all want our own way, and will stop at nothing to get it. We are God's enemies because we are self-centered and proud. We are total selfies as we ooze self-love, self-gratification, self-interest from every pore. That's why, nothing we do is truly good. Because of our inbred sin, even our motives are wrong, whether it's what we do or even our praying. Apart from our Lord's sacrificial love for us, displayed by His act of redemption, there are no pure motives. Yes, we are too often friends of the world and, thus, seek worldly things.

So we stand condemned by St. John's words: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions- is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 John 2:15-16). Of this we are all guilty.

And this desire for earthly things makes us each an enemy of God. James puts it this way, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." This is certainly strong language, and it needs to be if we are to really understand what he is trying to say. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me." And God means it.

When our desires are set only on ourselves and what we want, we have made ourselves god. If our primary or only concern is our happiness, then we have become God's enemies. If we prioritize sports, entertainment, pleasure, the attainment of status or stuff, even the bearing of grudges, you know, worldly things, over God and His Word and His gifts, we are friends with the world and at odds with God. And throughout the Old Testament, we read how God deals with His enemies. Paul warns the Galatians that those that live according to these sinful desires will not inherit the kingdom of God (5:19-21). This is surely a scary thought, especially when we see it from the standpoint of eternity.

We can't have it both ways. It is an either/or situation. We can't serve both God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). But, by ourselves, we can't do anything about it. From the time we are conceived and born, our focus is on ourselves and our desires.

And if that is as far as it goes, things would be pretty bleak for all of us. But James doesn't leave it there. He provides the solution to this problem, the cure for sinful pride: "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." What a contrast to earthly desires! And this perfectly describes the Lord Jesus who is divine wisdom incarnate. Jesus is that wisdom that came down from heaven above. And since He is true God, He is pure. There is no spot or stain or blemish of sin on Him. And, while He was on earth, He was peaceable, even when He responded with truly righteous anger, as when He overturned the tables in the temple and threw the moneychangers out. His life exhibited a gentleness and willing submission even as He submitted to the will of His Father in all things and was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He didn't fight back as He was accused, beaten, whipped, and finally nailed to the cross. He never sought revenge against His enemies. And He didn't show any partiality either. He died for all, including the Jews, the Romans, the thief on the cross, and you and me. He was willing to give up His life so that our sins would be forgiven and we would have eternal life.

Then, He rose from the dead three days later. His death earned forgiveness for all our sins, and His resurrection shows that His death was sufficient payment. And it's that forgiveness that God gives to us in Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. For these are the means by which God pours out His grace to us. And that's why James says that God gives us more grace. St. Paul puts it this way, "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20). Christ trumps Satan. Grace trumps sin. Resurrection trumps death. So as much as we desire to please ourselves, God's grace is strong enough to overcome it. God's forgiveness is greater than all our selfish ambition and envy. He gives to us His divine wisdom which enables us to be peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good works, impartial, and sincere.

When we were baptized, God gave us the faith by which we receive His forgiveness and the power to consider Him and our neighbor before ourselves. Because He sent His Son to be our Savior and His Spirit to create and sustain faith in our hearts through the Means of Grace, we no longer have to live as the world lives. We no longer have to choose the way of the world that causes all kinds of strife and division within our families and in Christ's Church. God's grace is greater than all of it. For through His grace, He bestows forgiveness and the power to overcome

the world. But if we are too proud to accept it, if we glory in our strength, if we'd rather go our own way, then we are God's enemies. But as the Holy Spirit works in us, as we realize our sinfulness and our inability to do anything about it, God's grace overcomes our selfishness and enables us to look to the needs of others.

And then, as we pray with proper motives, with God's will and the good of our neighbor in mind, God hears our prayers and is pleased to grant what we ask. John puts it this way:

This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Since we have been made children of God through our Baptism, He answers our prayers for the sake of Jesus. And this great grace from God empowers us to focus on Him and His kingdom. It helps us to live as His children. And when we need more of God's wisdom, we should ask for it confidently. After all, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But 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." (James 1:5-6). Rest assured, people loved by God, that He has given you grace and that He will give you more grace. Therefore, live in the confidence that you are His dear child, and live in peace with everyone. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener