

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a Trinity 17

“Who is wise and understanding among you?” James writes in his letter to Christians. What a question, but wouldn't it be wonderful to be remembered as being wise? If we are going to be wise we have to be humble, because humility comes from wisdom, heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom needs to be considered. If we are going to be a follower of Christ, says James, we need to be like Him in heavenly wisdom then we are going to have to show humility. Jesus-like wisdom has nothing to do with how much we know, it is all about how we live. Sometimes Christians are far more focused on being right than righteous. We might claim to have wisdom but in the process are so focussed on being right that we forget to be compassionate. Can we be surprised then when we are ignored and discounted?

In this passage James gives us valuable advice on how we can be sure the wisdom we follow is heaven focussed. If you are going to be Christ-like, if you want to be holy just as He is holy, then you have to work at this kind of wisdom. It goes something like this: It is a bit like a spiritual MOT!

Am I pure in motives and actions?

Is my reason for doing things Godly or worldly?

Is my reason for what I do because I'd like to do it this way, or is it because this is the way Jesus would do it?

Am I looking for common ground?

Am I looking for a way to move on from a falling out?

Am I considerate and can I keep being considerate, and keep showing respect regardless of provocation?

When I need to speak, can I do so in the right manner?

Am I teachable or am I someone who always has to be right?

If I can't be taught how can I learn what I need to learn?

Where is the wisdom in that?

James challenges us too about how merciful we are. We're often very happy to receive mercy but not so keen to dispense it. Sometimes the most merciful thing we can do is say nothing and walk away, praying that God will act in justice, for revenge belongs only to God. We should give mercy because we have been shown immense mercy.

Archbishop David Moxon, a New Zealander and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative to the Holy See and Director of the Anglican centre in Rome, has written;

“Every Christian wears an invisible sign around their necks, which reads “work in progress” or “be patient with me, God has not finished with me yet”, or, “you should have seen what I was like before”. James reminds us that conversion is an ongoing evolution as we are transformed spiritually. This is not a super religious, pious activity, but a day-by-day growing in integrity, faithfulness and hope. We are always growing out of the world and always growing into the ways of God. There is some ambiguity in this that every Christian learns to understand and work with. We have been saved, we are being saved, we shall be saved.

Each little victory over the ways of the world such as gluttony, aggression and hardness of heart is a possibility of growth in God.

We are called to see ourselves as learners in “the way” by paying deep attention to the state of our heart and by shaping the what we feel and think with consistent, attentive prayer, so that we are guided by the light within us rather than the shadow around us.”

We also wear the invisible sign of the cross that we were signed with at baptism and that is what enables us to wear the “work in progress” sign from the beginning.

³³ *Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”* ³⁴ *But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.*

The process goes right back to the days of the disciples \s we read in today’s gospel. They were arguing amongst themselves as to which of them was the greatest. It would appear that they, too, were as Archbishop Moxon would put it were, “work in progress”.

Somehow, I find that quite heartening!

Amen.