

Walking in Peace
James 3:13-4:3,7-8a
September 23, 2018 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Last week and this week we used as our unison prayer the Prayer of Saint Francis. Now, don't worry, we're not going to make that a habit; but, I love the Prayer of Saint Francis. While, in my personal prayer life, I generally pray extemporaneously and frequently silently; I also have certain mantra-like lines that I sometimes use to focus my prayers. I've stated several times in the last months that "Lead me, Lord. Lead me in thy righteousness. Make thy way plain before my face." is one of those lines. But, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." is another.

I've said before, that my favorite Hebrew Word is *shalom*. *Shalom* is usually translated as "peace," but *shalom* means far more than just an absence of war or an absence of violence. Yes, it means that; but it carries with it a sense of inner peace and quiet. Those who study yoga speak of walking in balance; and when they say that, yes, they mean physical balance, balance which the exercises help to develop; but they also mean a balanced life, a life where things are not off-kilter, where everything is in place, not just physically, be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And so it is with *shalom*. *Shalom* is perfect peace, inner stillness and calm.

Friends, that's the peace that James is talking about. James asks, "What is the wisdom from above, the wisdom from God?" Then he answers: "First it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine." Sounds a lot like the Fruits of the Spirit from Paul's writing: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I can't think of anything that would be more *shalom*, more peaceful than living these fruits; and that's the wisdom of God.

And James compares this wisdom with earthly wisdom, with the wisdom of the devil. Indeed, James does tend to be a bit dualistic – comparing heaven and earth, God and the devil, the spiritual with the physical. Yes, as much as I like James, he's a bit too dualistic for my taste. I generally resist the personification of evil, the concept of a devil-being running around urging or causing us to do evil sometimes seems one step shy of a guy in a red suit with pointed ears and a long pointed tail carrying a pitchfork. And still, as I say this, as I resist the concept of a devil, I cannot deny that there are truly evil forces in our world, and in some cases actually evil people. I also recognize that all of us have, at least the propensity to do evil. All of us have the ability to develop bitter envy and selfishness, to become boastful and deny the truth.

Friends, I was absolutely horrified when, a few weeks back, I heard Rudi Giuliani, the counsel to the President of the United States make the statement, and I quote: "Truth is not truth." Now, I assume that he was addressing what has come

to be called “fake news,” which sadly has become a reality in our society. But I have news for Mr. Giuliani, and for our friends in Washington on both sides of the aisle. There is only one truth, and it’s right here in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was true two thousand years ago when James penned his letter; it’s true today; and it will be true two thousand years from now. That truth is the Good News of God’s amazing love for all creation, God’s amazing love for you and for me, God’s amazing love for all people. This truth is true, and this truth will never change and will never die. And that’s the truth that James calls you and me to live out of.

Who among us has never looked at the possessions of another and thought, “Boy it would be nice if I could have that or if I could do that.” Who among us has never looked at the life of another and thought, “I wish I could be like them, doing the things they do, living the life they lead.” - envy and selfishness.

Friends, I tell you that you have all you need for inner peace, for *shalom*, for the wisdom from God; because you have the love of God. James asks, “What is the source of conflicts and disputes that you’re experiencing. What are the cravings that are at war within your lives?” I’ve stated before and I state again, I am deeply distressed by our government and by individuals that are more influenced by the happenings on Wall Street than by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why, I know individuals who will check the stock reports multiple times a day; but those same individuals have not cracked a Bible in years. Friends, there’s something wrong with that.

Now, don’t hear me saying that money does not matter. It’s only through the generosity of this congregation and congregations like ours that the United Methodist Church is able to reach out, to spread the love of God through aid and relief efforts around the world; and to make things still more personal, it’s only through the generosity of this congregation that I am able to stand before you today and preach this message. Paul recognized the value of the dollar. That’s why he collected an offering from his churches in Greece and Asia Minor to take back to support the work of the church in Jerusalem. But Paul also said, “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” We are called to love God. We are called to love the children of God; and yes, I believe we are called to love all the children of God, and that includes the align, the refugee, and the undocumented immigrant looking for a better life for their children. For the record, I am not in favor of open borders. Neither am I in favor of tearing families apart at the border or deporting law abiding contributing members of our society who have established homes and families here for decades.

But, setting socio-political matters aside, let’s get practical. How do we live in the peace that James purports? Most of you know that, for the last six months, I have been truly excited about The Daniel Plan. Some folks have wrongly labeled The Daniel Plan as a diet, because the food we eat is a major part of the plan. The founders of the program, two of whom are leading physicians, realize how the food we eat affects every aspect of our lives. Still, the Daniel Plan is based on five

elements: Faith, Food, Fitness, Focus, and Friends; and the founders believe, and I agree, that we cannot have a truly healthy life if any those five things are out-of-wack. Now I would love to see every member of this congregation go through the six week program that is the introduction to the Daniel Plan; but, whether you do that or not, I strongly encourage each of you to consider each of those five elements for yourselves: Faith, Food, Fitness, Focus, and Friends. Where could you stand to make some improvements; and where could you be a support to others?

I have recently begun a practice of mindful meditation. Now, don't hear that your pastor is practicing some sort of cultic activity. Mindful meditation is not a religious practice, although it is central to some religions. Mindful meditation is not even, in and of itself, a spiritual practice although it may open the mind to more easily experience a spiritual presence. The best way to explain it is to state that meditation seeks to establish a relaxation response that is the antithesis of stress response. Meditation seeks to put the mind totally at peace, allowing the entire body to relax, to find a state of rest that is even deeper than sleep. I tell you this, because meditating for just ten minutes twice a day has had an amazing affect on me; and I'll be glad to say more about this offline. Meditation is not part of The Daniel Plan, but it could rightly be put into that focus area.

And so, I once again bring up the Daniel Plan with its five elements, because together, those five elements can truly be a path to that inner peace, that wisdom from above, that *shalom* from God. May each of us build our lives on the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ. May each of us experience and share the wisdom that comes from God so that "evil" will literally run from you; and you will be enveloped in the loving arms of God where you will experience peace, and comfort, and joy every day of your life. May peace be with you all.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,
Let us walk in your peace.
Help us experience inner peace
 as we work for outward peace.
Help us share your peace and your love
 with your people everywhere,
 for you are the Prince of Peace
 and the embodiment of love.
Amen.

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