

September 22, 2024  
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

James 3:13 – 4:10

SIN’S WAR AND GOD’S PEACE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Today is the third Sunday in a row where we hear from the apostle St. James in his letter to Christians of all times and all places including you and me. He’s writing to people who know they’re saved by the grace of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Near the beginning of his letter, James writes:

***“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights... Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”*** (James 1:17–18)

Out of His Fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, God is the sole agent and giver of every good and perfect gift. He always moves first. He takes the initiative. The most precious of His good gifts given to you and all mankind is sending His Son Christ Jesus to accomplish the forgiveness of your sins and salvation on Calvary’s cross. By the word of His truth, which is the Gospel of Christ, God has brought you forth into new life and salvation.

***“A result of that new [life] involves being “a kind of firstfruits of his (new) creations” ... that anticipates the [fulfillment of all of God’s eternal promises] at Christ’s second coming [on the Last Day.]*** (Giese, James, Concordia Commentary, 45)

In his letter, James is writing to encourage Christians to not be double-minded, but live their lives as Christians. (cf: James 1:8, 4:8) You are either a child of Christ or a child of the world. You can’t have it both ways. A Christian should act like a Christian and should speak like a Christian. James is echoing Jesus’ teaching that a tree is known by its fruit. Christians bear fruits of repentance, faith, and good works that flow in response to the love that Christ has for them.

Two weeks ago we heard James encourage you and me and all Christians to not show partiality and favoritism toward others. We should instead treat all people with fairness and justice, bearing fruits of love, good works, and deeds. Faith that doesn’t bear the fruit of good works is no faith at all. (cf: James 2:1–10, 14–18)

Last week James warned us that the while every kind of beast and bird and creature in the world has been tamed by mankind, no human being can tame the tongue. It’s a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (cf: James 3:1–12) With our tongues we Christians:

***“... bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”***<sup>10</sup> ***From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.*** [Speaking

to you me and all believers, James says:] ***My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*** (James 3:7–10)

In our text today, James continues to voice his concern about the double-minded lives lived by Christians. Being new creations in Christ you and I are called to live together in our baptismal identity as firstfruits of the new creation. James moves from the teaching about the mixed use of the gift of the tongue, both blessing and cursing, to an alleged mixed wisdom, wisdom that comes from God versus a false **wisdom** that is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (cf: James 3:15) Again, a tree is known by its fruit. So James exhorts us Christians to:

***“... show [our] works in the meekness of wisdom.”*** (James 3:13)

***“... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*** (James 3:17–18)

But the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh always get in the way. Everywhere you look there is bitter jealousy and selfish ambition – and where there’s jealousy and selfish ambition – there is disorder and every vile deed, including quarrels, fights, and covetousness. (cf: James 3:14–4:2) You see it in the world. You see it and hear it on social media. You see it in your family and in the congregation. And most troubling, you see it in your own heart. As long as you and I live in the mortal body, we’re at war with the devil, the world, and our own sinful hearts. But as strong as the devil, the world, and your sinful heart seem to be – God refuses to let you go.

James writes:

***“... do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?’”*** (James 4:5)

It always seems awkward when Scripture refers to God being a jealous God. Usually when we talk about jealousy we’re talking about sin. There are times when jealous boyfriends become abusive and controlling husbands. Jealous people around you may treat you with spite and be unkind.

But if there’s anyone you want to be jealous over you, it’s God. For Him to be jealous is to say He wants you to Himself. You shall have no other gods because there are no other Gods – even though you and I chase after the false gods of the world and our sinful flesh. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ wants **no one else** to have you – not a false god or false idol, not false doctrine, false hope, or the devil himself ever to have you. In giving the First Commandment, He says:

***“... I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*** (Exodus 20:5–6)

Only the true God can be this kind of good jealous, jealous without sin – and we praise Him and are thankful that He is! In most cases jealousy does harm to another person, because jealously controlling another is perceived to the benefit of the jealous one. It’s selfishness. But God’s jealousy is a protective jealousy. It’s a guardian jealousy. It’s God loving you with a perfect love,

with no exception. And that's for your benefit. As James says, why else would Holy Scripture say: "**He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?**" God made His Spirit to dwell in you so that the Spirit may make and keep you His own. It's the Spirit that yearns jealously and is grieved when you and I become friends of the world and thus begin to be enemies of God. And this is why James talks about God's merciful and holy jealousy in terms of grace, saying:

**"... he gives more grace.... God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** (James 4:6)

You and I are humbled by our sin and are nothing but beggars before God because there's absolutely nothing we can offer Him for His favor. And in His loving jealousy, for all who trust in Him, He gives grace upon grace to strengthen our faith and trust in Him. The devil will certainly accuse you before God and before yourself. Yet each day, God's previous giving of more grace strengthens you, dear baptized believer, to resist the devil (cf: James 4:7) by calling out to your all-powerful God in repentant prayer who forgives your sins in Christ Jesus. Each day your forgiving Lord calls you to go to those whom you've sinned against and seek to be reconciled so that the devil's chaos gives way to God's order. While the devil indeed prowls around like a lion, looking for someone to devour, (cf: 1 Peter 5:8-9) on the Last Day, at Jesus' command, the old evil foe will cast into the eternal fire prepared for and him and his angels, the place of eternal torment in hell, and he will be gone forever. (cf: Matthew 25:41) Until Christ's return, James encourages us saying:

**"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."** (James 4:8)

While it is always true that when a believer in Christ draws near to God, He draws near to you, it's especially true right here in the Divine Service. In this place you are reminded of the baptismal promises made you at the font, that you have been cleansed in the washing of water with the Word, (cf: Ephesians 5:26) in the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, (cf: Titus 3:5) in which God poured out onto you the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. He also draws near to you in the hearing of His Gospel word. He draws near to you physically in His body and body in the Sacrament of the Altar.

James says:

**"Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."** (James 4:9)

It is better to mourn and weep now in repentance, and live as God's people, than not to repent, only to mourn and weep when you hear the verdict on the Last Day.

In the final words of our text James tells us what God-given faith and Holy Spirit-led repentance do: They make us humble before the Lord. He says:

**"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."** (James 4:10)

This is a verse of humility and God's blessing. Being humble before God because of your sin, God will exalt you. It's not something you do on your own but a work of the Holy Spirit. After repentance comes God's forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation with Christ your Savior. God has a wonderful way of dealing with the war within the believer, the war fueled by the devil, the world, and your own sinful heart. In this war, you have no peace, no hope – and never will –

apart from a peace which the world cannot give which is reconciliation with God. He refuses to let you go.

God has given you the grace of sins forgiven and the privilege of bearing fruits of repentance and faith. In Him, you can live out all that happens this coming week with the meekness of wisdom. The mirror of God's Law humbles and condemns you before God. And because He is a God who gives more grace, you are filled with living hope, able to withstand the devil's schemes and live in the joy of your salvation. It is God's pleasure to exalt you – raising you up to worship and serve Him, by serving and loving your neighbor as God in Christ Jesus serves and loves you.

Christ Jesus is the first fruits and pattern of God's grace and love in mercy, especially to us Christians who struggle with being double-minded. Thanks be to God that when you feel the urge to call upon God in repentant prayer, His grace and forgiveness is already upon you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.