



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 30, 2012
Pentecost 18
Sermon Text: [James 3:13-18](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Numbers 12:1-15](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 31](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Mark 9:30-37](#)

Display Divine Wisdom

It takes heavenly effort
It produces heavenly blessings

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

It kind of sounds like God doesn't want us to harbor bitter envy or selfish ambition. That comes out pretty clearly in what I just read to you. We don't really want to call it "selfish ambition." We use a lot of cliches to kind of cover it up, don't we? It's a doggy dog world out there. Maybe it is. You have to break a few eggs to make an omelet. So if at work you have to step on some other people, you'd rather say that than say "Well, you have to be a selfish jerk who just steps on people." We hide our selfish ambition, our evil actions, our evil attitudes behind worldly wisdom. You have to do these things to get ahead in life and if you don't do them, you'll get stepped on by others. So you better look out for #1 and do these kinds of things.

I think our Lord straightforwardly said "Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." I don't think he's saying that's a good thing. I think he's saying "Knock it off!" I think he's saying "I don't care if the world says you're naive if you don't think this way." If you don't do these things, the world wants to tell you you're being naive. You have to understand that you have to do these kinds of things. That's just the way it is. My sinful nature is just the way I am. That doesn't mean I should be listening to everything it tells me to do, does it?

If we are going to look at how God has lived for us and died for us, how he loved us perfectly while we were unlovable and took away our sins while we could give him nothing, then we want to say "I want to live for you. I want to imitate your love and love others that way." Out of necessity that would mean that we have to set aside our own bitterness and our own selfish ambition and see them for what they are.

Did you notice how the Lord used the three phrases just to drive it through our thick heads? "Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly." If you don't get what that means, he says it's "unspiritual." If you don't get what that means, he says it's "of the devil." This kind of worldly wisdom is of the devil. It is sin. I don't care if everyone is doing it. "I don't care about any of that" God is saying to you. "It's not

what you, as my children, are to do.” So our God tells us don’t display this kind of wisdom. Display divine wisdom as you conduct yourself in every area of your life.

That’s one of our mistakes, isn’t it? One of our shortcomings is that we tend to think of God time as the time we sit in church or God time as the time when we are at a meeting or we are serving in some other capacity. Our God is really telling us that God time is every moment of our life. That’s the time we have as the opportunity to display the wisdom that comes down from above, to display the wisdom that reflects that we are blood-bought souls by Jesus and that we love him more than we love ourselves. We don’t want to let self control our thinking. We want God and his Spirit to control our thinking. We want to live for him to thank him that he has given us the gift of heaven. That’s divine wisdom. It takes heavenly effort. You and I are not inclined to doing that on our own.

I spent a lot of time driving over the last weekend. When you are driving over a long period of time, eventually someone cuts you off, someone blows by you, someone drives as a fool near you. When they do that to you, what is your first thought? “Gee, I’m glad I pulled over and got out of the way. They must be in a hurry to get someplace important.” Is that your first thought? I don’t think so. It takes effort to display heavenly wisdom. Our wisdom is all earthly, unspiritual and of the devil. Did you ever have that experience where you see them and then they pull out in front and you see them coming up on a slow car, so you want to gun it so you can get by them so they can’t get back out and get on their way? Did you ever have that impulse? Or is that just me?

Heavenly wisdom does not come to us by nature. Our nature is worldly wisdom. Our nature is bitterness. Bitterness towards co-workers comes easily to us at times, doesn’t it? Selfish ambition comes easily to us. No one has to tell us to be bitter. No one has to tell us to be selfishly ambitious at the expense of someone else. There’s nothing wrong with saying I want to use all my gifts to the best of my ability. That’s what God wants us to do. But selfish ambition means you are doing it at the expense of someone else. You’re stepping on someone else. God says “That’s not the heavenly wisdom I want you to display.” But you and I will go there every single time because that’s our sinful nature. It takes effort to get to where God wants us.

Heavenly wisdom, wisdom that comes from heaven, is pure. None of those thoughts I just told you were pure. They reveal my selfish nature. They reveal your selfish nature. They reveal our sinful nature. They are sin. They are not loving others as we love ourselves. That is what God has told us to do. Peace loving...the world calls peace loving weakness. But as a Christian, for you and I as Christians, doesn’t it take strength that we don’t have on our own to not lash back at people, to promote peace by not answering anger in anger, to promote peace by answering anger with calm and love and the reason that God gives us and the love and patience that God gives us? That’s hard work. That takes heavenly effort. You and I are not often inclined to it.

Then when we do it in our actions, we are busy patting ourselves on the back. I don’t know about you, but in my mind, I’ve already chewed him out three or four different

times in three or four different ways. Even when I control my actions, my thoughts are still sinning against my God. It takes heavenly effort and constant effort and ongoing effort to grow in faith to the point where this becomes something we want to do, not just something I know I should do and I have to get better at doing. This is what I want to do because my God loved me so much that he took away all of my sins. He's taken away all those times that I've done those foolish things. All the times your bitterness and your selfish ambition has come out in your life, Christ lived and died for every last one of those.

Think about that. He gets nothing out of it. You get everything out of it. You get the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus. Heaven is not going to be better because you or I are there, but God loved us that much he died for those sins so that we can be in heaven.

That's why we want to make this effort. That's why we want to work at getting better at all of these things he talks about here, being considerate, being submissive, putting the interest of something else ahead of our own interests. As a society, we are a society full of rights. If someone else steps on our rights, we don't want to submit and set aside our right for the benefit of someone else ever, do we? It's just not natural. That's why this takes effort. It takes the effort that comes from spending more time with our God, by understanding more completely and more fully and more deeply the depth of his love for us that led him to take away our sins.

This means we have to do that hard work, that nasty work, the dirty work of seeing ourselves for what we are. We are good at seeing each others' sins. We are good at seeing when someone steps on our rights. How good are we at seeing when we step on someone else's rights or when we are not considerate of someone else. How good are we at seeing that? We can see when someone else cuts us off. Do we see when we cut other people off, and not just driving?

That's hard work. But when we do that work and see ourselves for the sinners that we are and when we fully understand the depth of God's love that led him to take away every last one of those sins, then it becomes more of the "I want to live for my God because he loves me so much. He's forgiven me so much. He's done so much for me." Then I want to do all these things, and the more I want to do them, God makes this incredible promise to you and me.

It's a beautiful promise. It's a promise that has meaning in our daily lives. It's a promise that has meaning in our congregational life. It's a promise that has meaning for our personal life. He tells us the more we do this, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." That's his promise. The more that we live with heavenly wisdom, the more we will be blessed and others around us will be blessed with this harvest of righteousness.

This harvest of righteousness is not just talking about the good things that we do out of love for God. The more we live our faith, the more that people see this, they'll see that

it's not the way of the world. It's not worldly wisdom. It's a different wisdom. Then we'll have the opportunity, when people come to us and say "Why are you different? Why are you more considerate? Why are you more loving? Why are you more patient? Why didn't you just rip me a new one when anyone else would have?" We get to answer by pointing them to our Savior, and we raise a harvest of righteousness as the Spirit works faith in someone else's heart.

God promises to bless us as we live for him. I don't know about you, but I don't want to call him a liar. I'm going to take him at his Word and believe it. That means I am going to need to make that effort to see my sin, to see what I've been forgiven, to see how much I need to grow in heavenly wisdom, and then put it into practice. It's not easy, but it's worth it. It doesn't earn us heaven. We do it because God has already given us heaven when he gave us the gift of faith. We live in response to the love God has shown us and we live in response to it by seeking to get better at living in a godly way, loving like God loved us, even when we are attacked by others, even when our sinful nature wants that bitterness and selfish ambition, learning more and more to set it aside and living in a way that loves as we have been loved.

You'll never do it perfectly on this side of heaven. But God is urging you to never stop getting better at living in this way, until he takes you to your heavenly home. Amen.