

**Sermon for
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
A Day of Prayer and Supplication**

Date: September 15, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

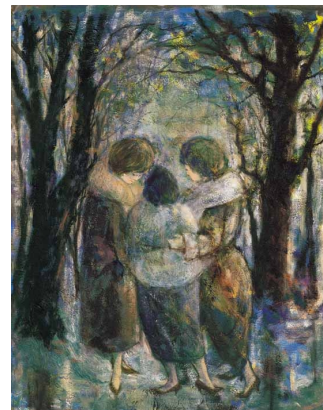
Old Testament: Isaiah 50:4-10

Epistle Reading: James 3:13-18

Gospel Reading: Matthew 12:33-37

Sermon Text: James 3:13-18

Sermon Title: Gossip Gonna Get Ya'



Introit: Psalm 31:16-18; Antiphon Psalm 31:23

Hymns:

LSB 706 – Love in Christ is Strong and Living
This Little Gospel Light of Mine

LSB 781 – We Give Thee But Thine Own (v1.2)

LSB 845 – Where Charity and Love Prevail

Distribution:

LSB 743 – Jesus, Priceless Treasure

LSB 770 – What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 206



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Text: James 3:13-18

Do any of you have wisdom and insight? Show this by living the right way with the humility that comes from wisdom. If you are bitterly jealous and filled with self-centered ambition, don't brag. Don't say that you are wise when it isn't true. That kind of wisdom doesn't come from above. It belongs to this world. It is self-centered and demonic. Wherever there is jealousy and rivalry, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

The wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure. Then it is peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good deeds, impartial, and sincere. A harvest that has God's approval comes from the peace planted by peacemakers.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the book of James in the Bible we read:

Do any of you have wisdom and insight? Show this by living the right way, with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous, and filled with self-centered ambition, don't brag. Don't say that you are wise when it isn't true.¹

That's pretty straight forward. There's no hidden message in those words. There's nothing in those verses that is hard to understand. The words simply say what they say. The only secret you might have to dig up here is to discover who James is speaking to. He's not preaching to unbelievers. He's not talking to people outside of the Church. He is talking to members, people on the inside.

The truth is some of the things we see here are a really a bit insidious, and more seductive than just a love of position and power. There are things that like to lurk in the shadows and call our name to come have a look, like strangers offering candy to children. Things that grow, not just in everyone else, but inside ourselves. Those skulls in the forest that seek to tear down and destroy. James talks about things like bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, claiming to be wise about the Bible and the Christian faith, when there is actually no effort to hear the truth in Scripture. James is talking to people who mark their Bibles but whose Bibles do not mark them.

James has some strong words when he talks about that sort of thing. He says such things are self-centered and demonic.² Demonic, that's a strong word, but that's the word James, the brother of Jesus, uses. Demonic, that means acting like a demon, a servant of Satan, one who does the bidding of Lucifer. Can people like that actually be in the Church? Can those people actually come to church every Sunday? Sure they can. In fact the Bible goes a step further. James isn't the only one who had to deal with this sort of thing. St. Paul wrote about those people when he said:

These people are dishonest workers. They disguise themselves as Christ's disciples. And it is no wonder, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it's not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as

1 **James 3:13-14**

2 **James 3:15** – That kind of wisdom doesn't come from above. It belongs to this world. It is self-centered and demonic.

servants who have God's approval. In the end they will get what they deserve.³

I spoke to a man, years ago, who had been a pastor but had left the ministry because of people he called "alligators." People who lie low in the water looking harmless. They even might do some good for the congregation. They lie in wait until they see an opportunity and then they attack and with a vengeance. They are often looking for their own personal gain. They are people who like to bring others down. They take joy in watching others hurt, especially when they get to bring the hurt. When they are done they slink back into the water and wait for the next opportunity.

They are skulls in the shadows always whispering, always twisting the truth. Like skeletons in a haunted forest lurking for the next time to strike. When opportunities arise, strike they do, and with a vengeance.

That is what James is talking about, "alligators," "skulls in the forest." They had to deal with that sort of thing back then and the Church today still has such people lurking in its membership. They are noxious, they are demonic, but all dressed up like angels of light. Just like Paul said.⁴ They were destructive in the Church of Jesus Christ back then, and they are still destructive in the Church of God now. One pastor, that I know, describes them as:

"...seductive people who hide behind, and make sanctimonious use of, the smoke screens of sanctity, to hide those dark qualities."⁵

I have seen this sort of thing in congregations. It was in fact that sort of thing that kept me out of the ministry for so long. Watching pastors get attacked, lied about, lied to, and demeaned. When I see, in the very House of God, these facades of Christianity hiding in darkness and spiritual filth, it reminds me why Jesus described the gate as narrow, and the road as hard, for the faithful. That's why He says, "Few find the way."⁶

When that stuff starts happening in a congregation the church becomes a swirling cauldron of conflict, instead of the very visible voice of grace in the

3 **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** (*Adapted*)

4 **2 Corinthians 11:15** – So it's not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants who have God's approval. In the end they will get what they deserve.

5 Rev. Dr. Francis C Rossow professor of Homiletics, Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Mo

6 **Matthew 7:13-14** – Enter through the narrow gate because the gate and road that lead to destruction are wide. Many enter through the wide gate. But the narrow gate and the road that lead to life are full of trouble. Only a few people find the narrow gate.

community, that it should be. Do you see why James, Paul, and other, call this stuff insidious. It brings the Church's focus inside, and pulls it away from the work of bringing God's Word outside. It is insidious. It is seductive. It is demonic.

James warns us all to be on guard, be on the lookout for such things. Those whispering little digs in your ear. "Did you hear this?" "Did you see that?" Spreading, through the seeds of gossip, weeds that grow and choke off the Church. Weeds that flourish and grow like mushrooms that you find in the dank, dark and shadowy places of the forest.

These weeds don't do well in the light. The light burns them up. It shows them to be what they really are. James warns us all, don't let them get a foothold. Shine a bright light on them. Point them out. Give them no dark corners in which to hid. Let the Gospel Light of Jesus shine, ever so brightly, in every place.

Paul writes:

Can right and wrong be partners? Can light have anything in common with darkness? Can Christ agree with Satan? Can a believer share life with an unbeliever? Can God's Temple contain false gods?⁷

That is the contrast James makes. First he talks about those Lucifer-like lies; that are the "wisdom of the world." Then he compares that to "Wisdom from above;" Wisdom from Heaven. Wisdom that is pure, peaceful, gentle, humble, obedient, filled with good deeds, and mercy, not lies and accusations that tear down and destroy.⁸ He strings together a whole list of good traits that make for good faith, and a good and healthy environment in which a congregation can thrive, prosper and grow. Qualities that were shown to us in the One called "Wisdom" in the Proverbs.⁹ The One who came from Heaven and lived among us. The One who gave us hope and salvation from the cross, in spite of the sedition around us, and in us. He gave us these gifts from above, the gifts of the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ gifts from the Holy Spirit of Wisdom.¹¹

7 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

8 **James 3:17** – the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure. Then it is peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good deeds, impartial, and sincere.

9 **Proverbs 8** – Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise its voice? ...

10 **Galatians 5:22-23** – But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are no laws against things like that.

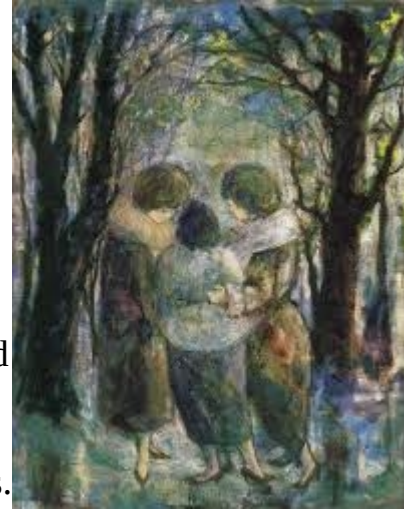
11 **Isaiah 11:2** – The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of advice and power, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

He did that, so that among us, even among us, no matter how flawed a people of God we know ourselves to be, this Wisdom of peace can be a reality. It can be that gracious anomaly, a peculiar and great treasure, a delightful divine disruption, in a sinfully stained world.

James asks:

Do any of you have wisdom and insight? Show it by living the right way, with the humility that comes from wisdom.¹²

Avoid those things that tear apart, breakdown and destroy. Avoid those things that get in the way of God's good Word and work. Things that get in the way of living as children of God. Things that get in the way of the Church spreading God's Word and doing God's work, in accordance with God's will and God's command. Don't be like the three whispering people in the picture bringing the things of poison and death. In fact don't just avoid them, flee from them. Those things always dwell in the dank and the dark. They cannot survive in the Light, so turn on the lights.



We need to cut that stuff off before it takes root, and we do that by turning on the lights, the Gospel Light of Jesus. We start by looking to the Light of the World.¹³ We come before our Lord and pray, “bind out hearts and minds to Your will O Lord.” We make a conscious effort to regularly stay in His Word, because reading His Word has an effect on us. Those who spread their stain of sin through gossip and lies are never in that Word, because they can't be bothered with what God would teach us.

We need to open our ears, first to our God, and then to those around us. When you hear those whispers, those little digs, the secrets and rumors, they will sound like they don't belong because we've grown accustomed to the right kind of words, the Word of God. Hearing and knowing the truth makes the counterfeits more clearly visible.

I've used this example before, of people who are trained to spot counterfeit money. Do you know how they are trained? They don't study counterfeit bills. In fact they don't look at the various counterfeits at all, they never look at them. They

¹² **James 3:13**

¹³ **John 8:12** – Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have a life filled with light and will never live in the dark.”

study legitimate bills. They study the real thing. They learn all of the intricate details and characteristics of those real bills. They do that over and over again. Week after week, month after month, they look at the real thing. Then when their eyes see a fake it stands out right away. It stands out because it is not like all those legitimate bills that they have been studying.

That's how it is with God's Word. We might think, "I've read that before, I know what it says." If that's true, that's good. People should read and learn from God's Word but reading it just once isn't enough. You have to read it again and again. You have to keep it in front of you. You have learn all of the intricate details and characteristics of those real Words. Then when your ears hear a lie, or a half truth meant to harm, when you spot people like those three in the picture, bringing their poison and death, it stands out right a way. It stands out because it is not like all those legitimate Words that have been studied over and over.

That's how you turn on the lights. That's how you burn up those sprouts of sin and gossip before their roots dig in. That's how we keep our house swept clean¹⁴ of such things, before they start to change our attention from spreading God's Word outside, to inventing problems inside.

We know this stuff. We've all been taught it. We've all heard Martin Luther's explanation to the eighth commandment:

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

Martin Luther had to deal with "alligators" too. Those skulls in the forest.

Our words should be encouraging not discouraging. Words that tear down not only affect current members of our congregation but new members and visitors who hear such things. They formulate their opinion of us based on what they hear and in these cases their faith is tested rather than being built up.

St. Paul writes:

14 "A House Swept Clean" is the title of a book by an LCMS Pastor Darrell McCulley on demonic possession and exorcism, giving reference to Luke 11:25.

“We should all be concerned about our neighbor and the good things that will build his faith.¹⁵”

He also wrote:

“Since we belong to the day, we must be sober. We must put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. It was not God’s intention that we experience His anger, but that we obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that, whether we are awake in this life, or asleep in death, we will live together with Him. Therefore, encourage each other and strengthen one another.¹⁶”

Gossip and demeaning comment only serve to divide a congregation. It really is a poison. Such lies can only be invented and spoken with contempt in one’s heart. Good Christian people do not slander another’s good Christian name. These actions do not display Christian love or charity, nor do they reflect the Christian faith, as we confess it in this church.

A woman went to her pastor to privately confess her sin. She was always gossiping and even though she knew it was wrong she just kept doing it. She made her confession to her pastor and ask what she should do. She assumed he’d tell her to pray more or read her Bible more.

Instead he replied, “I want you to find a feather pillow. Then on a windy day I want you to climb up on the roof of your house. In that wind I want you to rip open the pillow. When you have finished your task return and talk to me.”

The woman thought it a strange thing to do, but she respected her pastor, so she waited for a windy day. As she propped up the ladder and saw the neighbors watching she understood what her pastor was doing. As she clamored up the ladder, pillow in hand, more neighbors watched. Then sitting on the peak of the roof she ripped open the pillow. The feathers flew everywhere. Neighbors called other neighbors out from their houses to watch the spectacle.

The woman, as she climbed down from the roof, was now the object of town gossip. She had gotten a taste of her own medicine. She felt foolish. She felt embarrassed. Humbly she went back to her pastor to say she understood.

15 **Romans 15:2**

16 **I Thessalonians 5:8-11**

Upon arriving the pastor asked, “Did you complete your task?”

The woman said, “I did, and I understand...”

“Wait!” The pastor interjected, “there is one more thing you must do. Go collect all the feathers and put them back into the pillow.”

“But that’s impossible,” the woman said. “Those feathers have been blow from here to kingdom come. It would be impossible to gather them all back up again.”

“That,” the pastor said, “is just like gossip. Once it’s out you can’t pull it back. It spreads like feathers in the wind.”

Our job here should be to provide a safe and encouraging place for people to feel comfortable. We should provide a place where they can worship God in peace. Gossip never solves problems. It only makes more.

St. Paul would teach us:

Live as children who have light. Light produces everything that is good, that has God’s approval, and that is true. Determine which things please the Lord.¹⁷

Then chase after them. Don’t run into cliques and groups like the three in the woods whispering in shadows. Run from that. Chase after those things that cause us to be what God desires for our lives. Live in the grace, peace and mercy that only Jesus gives. If you have sins for which you should repent do it now. Do it before you come to this Table to partake of Jesus’ body and blood. Do not give God a reason to be angry with you.¹⁸

In His name.

Amen.

17 **Ephesians 5:8-10**

18 **1 Corinthians 11:27** – Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks from the Lord’s cup in an improper way will be held responsible for the Lord’s body and blood.