

**Sermon – First Congregational Church Mukwonago, WI
Sunday, September 24, 2000**

Wisdom

TEXT: JAMES 3:13-4:3, 7-8A

FOCUS: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

AS PAUL GREETED HIS CHURCHES

WHEN HE CAME INTO THE CITIES TO PREACH.....

I GREET YOU.....

GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

FROM GOD OUR FATHER, LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

AND GREETINGS FROM FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

WAUWATOSA. AMEN.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE IS FROM THE BOOK OF JAMES.

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN PROBABLY

IN THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

WE DO KNOW IT WAS WRITTEN TO A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

WITH STRONG JEWISH HERITAGE.

**JAMES IS ADDRESSING MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
WHO GATHER IN THE NAME OF JESUS**

**AND PROFESS THE FAITH OF THE GLORIOUS LORD JESUS CHRIST,
BUT WHOSE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS**

ARE NOT YET FULLY IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD.

(THAT CONCEPTSTRUCK HOME CLOSESLY WITH ME.

---WE ARE A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

---WORSHIPPING WEEKLY

---PROFESSING OUR FAITH IN JESUS

AND YET,SOMETIMES

IT IS HARD TO BE IN FULL FRIENDSHIP OR TRUST GOD FULLY.)

TOO OFTEN WE AND (JAMES' AUDIENCE OF THE TIME,)

THINK OF CONVERSION, AS A ONCE-FOR-ALL THING.

TURNING TO CHRIST IS THOUGHT TO BE THE FINAL ANSWER.

--EVERYTHING IN A PERSON'S LIFE

BEFORE THAT TURNING

IS SEEN AS DARKNESS

AND EVERYTHING AFTER IT

MUST, THEREFORE, BE CAST IN LIGHT.

SORT OF LIKE THE MODERN PHRASE

(DO YOU SEE THE LIGHT?)

BUT JAMES SEES CONVERSION

AS SOMETHING THAT IS NEVER COMPLETE.

AS YOU READ THE BOOK OF JAMES

AND PARTICULARLY THESE VERSES...

IT IS HELPFUL TO KNOW

ALITTLE ABOUT THE THEORY OF ANCIENT JEWISH PREACHING...

---JEWISH PREACHING WAS DELIBERATLEY DISSCONNECTED.

----THE PREACHER WOULD JUMP FROM SUBJECT TO SUBJECT.

---THIS WAS THOUGHT TO KEEP THE INTEREST OF THE AUDIENCE.

-----FREQUENTLY THE JEWISH SERMON

WAS A STRING OF MORAL TRUTHS.

[AN UNKNOWN WRITER DESCRIBED THE CONTENTS OF A SERMON]

**“COMPARING IT TO A HANDFUL OF PEARLS DROPPED ONE BY ONE INTO THE
HEARER’S MINDS.”**

THE THOUGHT I ASK YOU TO PONDER AS WE READ THESE VERSES, IS...

*******HOW DOES WISDOM MANIFEST ITSELF?**

YOU WILL HEAR JAMES EXAMINE “WISDOM”

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JEALOUSY AND PRIDE

THE DANGER OF HOSTILITY

AND THE VALUE OF HUMILLITY.

JAMES 3: 13-4:3, 7&8A

BEFORE HEARING MORE WORDS.....

WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT... TOO DEEPLY....

I ASK YOU TO CALL UP A MENTAL IMAGE

OF SOMEONE WHO IS “SMART”

(PAUSE)

GOT IT?

NOW, JUST AS QUICKLY,

PICTURE SOMEONE WHO HAS “WISDOM”

I WOULD BET YOU IMAGED,

TWO VERY DIFFERENT CONCEPTS.

----- -----

I HAVE ASKED THIS QUESTION OF SOME PEOPLE...

THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSE OF A “SMART” PERSON

WAS ONE WHO WORE LARGE GLASSES

MALE OR FEMALE PERSON

WHO WORE AN EXPENSIVE CONSERVATIVELY

STYLED BUSINESS SUITS OR DRESSES.

SOME OF THE COMMENTS WERE MORE SPECIFIC:

WHITE, FORTYISH, TALL, SLENDER.

THERE WAS AN AURA OF “SUCCESS” SURROUNDING HIS/HER IMAGE.

POSSIBLY DRIVING THAT LEXUS OR BMW.

THIS PERSON WAS IMPRESSIVE

AND MIGHT EVEN APPEAR A BIT INTIMIDATING.

NOW LETS TURN TO THE WORD “WISDOM”

WE HAVE A COMPLETELY OPPOSITE TYPE PERSON IMERGING.

THIS PERSON MIGHT HAVE A FACE CREASED

AND WORN AND LINED WITH WRINKLES.

THE HAIR PROBABLY GREY,

MAYBE EVEN LONGISH...

SORT OF MORE OF THE “EINSTEIN LOOK”

THIS PERSONS CLOTHES WERE RUMPLED

AND CERTAINLY NOT JUST OUT OF THE LATEST

GQ MEN’S MAGAZINE

OR VOGUE FOR WOMEN’S STYLES.

ONE PERSON COMMENTED.....

THIS WISE PERSON WOULD BE OF THE “SENIOR CITIZEN” RANKING.

**YET WITH ALL THESE PHYSICAL IMAGES THE WISE PERSON
THIS PERSON WOULD HAVE A SENSE OF PEACE
AND CONTENTMENT EMANATING FROM THEIR PERSONALITY.
HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW SOMEONE JUST LIKE THAT?**

**NOW I WOULD IMAGINE
THAT EACH OF US SITTING HERE THIS MORNING
MAY HAVE CONJURED UP A LITTLE DIFFERENT
IMAGE FOR EACH WORD.**

**HOWEVER, I WOULD BE WILLING TO BET
THAT BEING “SMART”
AND BEING “WISE”
INHABIT TWO DIFFERENT PLACES IN OUR MIND.**

LET’S BEGIN TO DELVE A LITTLE DEEPER....

**WHICH IMAGE,
THE “SMART” ONE
OR THE “WISE” ONE,
IS MORE APPEALING?
FROM OUR VISION, THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN BEING RICH,
SUCCESSFUL AND WELL-GROOMED**

OR BEING OLD, WRINKLED

AND HAVING A PERPETUALLY BAD-HAIR DAY.

*******WHICH ONE WOULD BE YOUR CHOICE?**

THE MENTAL IMAGES WHICH EACH OF US VISION

ARE PREDETERMINED BY CULTURAL BIASES

AND PREJUDICES

AND ARE VERY SOLIDLY IMBEDDED INTO OUR BRAINS.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CONCEPT OF "SMART"

IN THE CULTURE WE ARE LIVING IN TODAY.

YES, RIGHT HERE IN THE UNITED STATES,

WISCONSIN, AND MUKWONAGO.

THINK ABOUT IT....

THAT IS WHY THE IMAGES WE VISIONED FOR "SMART"

WERE SO.... SHALL I USE THE WORD

"HIGHLY VALUED" OF THE "RULING ELITE"

WE MAY GO AS FAR AS SAYING THE "RICH AND FAMOUS".

*****BEING "WISE" IS A QUALITY THAT DOESN'T EASILY**

FIT INTO OUR CONSUMER-ORIENTED CULTURE.

BEING WISE DOES NOT INCREASE THE TIMES

WE PULL OUT THE VISA CARD

TO BUY, BUY AND BUY

(WHICH SEEMS TO BE

THE LATEST ITEM TO MAKE US APPEARSMART!!)

“WISDOM” ON THE OTHER HAND

KIND OF TAKES A BACK SEAT TO THE CONSUMER WORLD,

WE RESIDE IN DAY TO DAY.

ALSO WE SEEM TO VERY OFTEN THINK OF

THE VERY OLD AND POSSIBLY EVEN THE VERY YOUNG

SOME PEOPLE GO SO FAR TO EVEN THINK OF THE POOR

AND POWERLESS

AS POSSIBLY HAVING A QUALITY OF WISDOM.

AT TIMES WE THINK OF “WISDOM”

AS BEING A VIRTUE

AND IT IS A WONDERFUL LUXURY

TO DEVELOP WHEN WE LOOK TO OUR RETIREMENT YEARS.

IT IS SORT OF A BACKDOOR COMPLEMENT TO OUR CULTURE

TO CLAIM THAT WISDOM IS ACHIEVED IN OLD AGE.

IF THE TRUTH BE KNOWN

**WE THINK WE ARE TOO BUSY
DOING THE “REALLY IMPORTANT” THINGS OF LIFE,
TOO BUSY TRYING TO BE “SMART”
TO BE BOTHERED WITH SUCH AN INTANGIBLE,
UNCASHABLE QUALITY AS “WISDOM”.**

**IT IS TIME TO EXAMINE THE CONCEPT OF WISDOM ...
AS A QUALITY OF LIFE AND FAITH IN ANCIENT ISRAEL.
WISDOM WAS AN INTREGAL PART
OF A COMPASSIONATE PERSON’S MIND AND SPIRIT.
LET US LOOK AT THE JEWISH WISDOM BOOKS...
SOMETIMES WE THINK OF THEM
AS TOO CONCERNED WITH BASICS OF LIVING
TO APPEAL TO OUR LOFTY SPIRITUAL AIMS.**

**JEWISH WISDOM STRESSED REALISM.
LET’S JUST QUICKLY RETURN FOR A MOMENT
AT THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.
(BY THE WAY, SCRIPTURE REFERS TO WISDOM AS
“SHE”)**

Prov 3:13-16

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.”

**THIS TEXT READS AS SORT OF
AS THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WORDS OF WISDOM.
CLEAR AND TO THE POINT.**

**RETURNING TO THE BOOK OF JAMES
WE HEAR THE VERY CLEAR QUESTION...**

**“HOW CAN WE LIVE
SO AS NOT TO DISPLEASE GOD
BUT CONTINUE IN GOD’S FAVOR”?
ACCORDING TO JEWISH WISDOM
THERE WAS NO MUMBLE JUMBLE OF WORDS
OR SECRET CODES.
IT WAS STATED THAT WISDOM IS MORE THAN
THE GREATNESS OF SILVER AND GOLD.**

JESUS SPOKE A BIT OF WISDOM TO HIS DISCIPLES
THAT THEY SHOULD BE

“AS WISE AS SERPENTS AND AS INNOCENT AS DOVES.”

WISDOM IS NOT THE SAGE,
OR THE SANCTIMONIOUS SAYINGS OF OLD FOLK.
IT IS THE INFORMED, INSPIRED,
YET HUMBLE MOVEMENT OF GOD’S SPIRIT
AND INSIGHT WITHIN THE HUMAN HEART AND MIND.
WHEN JAMES URGES CHRISTIANS
TO ACT WISELY IN THEIR COMMUNITY OF FAITH,
HE IS DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN
THOSE WHO KNOW MORE
AND THOSE WHO KNOW BETTER.

AS I WAS THINKING ABOUT
HOW TO EXPRESS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING SMART
AND BEING WISE,

***I THOUGHT ABOUT THE BIRD WORLD.

OWLS ARE A CLASSIC SYMBOL OF WISDOM.

POSSIBLY IT IS THEIR QUIET WAYS,
THEIR WIDE-EYED, TAKING IT ALL IN STARE

OR THE FACT THAT THEY CAN SWIVEL

THEIR NECKS 180 DEGREES

AND SO KEEP AS SHARP A LOOKOUT BEHIND THEM

AS THEY CAN IN FRONT OF THEM,

THAT GIVES THEM THIS REPUTATION FOR “WISDOM.”

THIS SUMMER, I WAS OUT WALKING IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN

ONE EARLY EVENING.

I RECALL HEARING THAT FAMILIAR HOOTING SOUND

OFF IN THE DISTANCE.

I WAS FORTUNATE TO LOOK UP AND SEE

ONE OF THOSE WISE OLD CREATURES.

IT STOOD SO STRAIGHT AND JUST LOOKED

AS IF IT HAD CONTROL OVER ALL THE FOREST.

IN CONTRAST.....

CROWS AND RAVENS ARE KNOWN TO BE VERY SMART BIRDS.

STUDIES HAVE BEEN DONE

THEY CAN BE TAUGHT TO TALK

AND CAN FIGURE OUT FAIRLY COMPLEX LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS.

HOWEVER, CROWS AND RAVENS

ARE ALSO COMPULSIVE COLLECTORS.

THEY WILL FILL THEIR NESTS WITH ODD BITS OF SHINY METAL,
GLEAMING BUTTONS, BRIGHT STRING
ANYTHING GLITZY AND GAUDY

THAT CATCHES THEIR EYE IS DRAGGED HOME.

I AM SURE, YOU ALSO

HAVE EXPERIENCED THE CHATTERING

AND SQUACKING RACKET THAT THEY CAN MAKE.

QUITE A CONTRAST FROM THE PEACEFUL HOOT OF AN OWL.

IN TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

JAMES TELLS CHRISTIANS TO EMBODY WISDOM

OR WE COULD SAY.... BE THE OWLS OF THIS WORLD.

IT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS A WORLD

WHERE THERE IS THE PARADOX

OF MORE AND MORE INFORMATION

(MORE AND MORE SQUACKING RACKET)

AND LESS AND LESS WISE OLD OWL WISDOM.

TOO MANY OF US HAVE BECOME CROWS

SMART TO THE WAYS OF THE WORLD,

BUT STUPIDLY SUCKERED IN TO ANY BRIGHT NEW IDEA,

ANY SLICKLY APPEALING GIMMICK.

**THESE AGGRESSIVE CROWS WILL BATTLE AWAY AT EACH OTHER
ATTEMPTING TO SNATCH AWAY THE OTHER CROWS
APPEALING PIECE OF JUNK.**

**NEXT TIME YOU ARE OUTSIDE AND YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO WATCH SOME CROWS....
JUST WATCH THEM SCREAM AND SCREECH AND
REALLY ATTACK EACH OTHER OVER SOME TINY
BIT OF WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS A COVETED GOODY.**

NOW, LOOK AT OUR CHRISTIAN OWLS.

IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

WE ARE REMINDED

THAT WE ARE NOT CALLED TO WAGE WAR

BUT TO SHOW WISDOM TO THE WORLD.

BUT WISE OLD OWLS....OR CHRISTIANS...

LOOK ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THAN BLACK UGLY CROWS.

THROUGH WISDOM WE DISCOVER TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

WISDOM IS THE ABILITY TO APPLY THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

TO OUR DAILY LIVES THROUGH OBEDIENCE.

JAMES MAKES IT CLEAR; YOU CAN'T KNOW GOD

WITHOUT DOING HIS WILL.

JAMES WRITES...

“WHO IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOU?

LET HIM SHOW IT BY HIS GOOD LIFE,

BY DEEDS DONE IN THE HUMILITY

THAT COMES FROM WISDOM.”

JAMES IS TELLING THIS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY...

SHOW YOUR WISDOM BY YOUR GOOD LIFE.

---BY LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

----BE OBEDIENT TO THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

AND DO IT NOT WITH JEALOUSEY

PRIDE AND ALL THOSE OTHER DANGERS OF HOSTILITY.

BUT DO IT WITH HUMILITY.

WE AS CHRISTIANS WE NEED TO LOOK AT PURITY,

PEACE, GENTLENESS,

REASONABLENESS

MERCY, GOOD FRUITS AND SINCERITY.

SEEKING THE WISDOM JAMES SPEAKS OF
IS IN THE CONTEXT OF DESIRING TO LIVE GODLY LIVES
IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLES.

I LOVE THE FINAL WORDS OF THIS SCRIPTURE READING...
TAKE COMFORT IN THE PROMISE AND HOPE THEY OFFER
“DRAW NEAR TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU.”

GO OUT INTO THE WORLD
OUT BEYOND THESE DOORS
AND BE WISE OWLS
DRAWING NEAR TO YOUR GOD
AND GOD WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU. AMEN.