Coram Deo

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura

Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi

Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United

by the Rev. Capt Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

**"The Word that Improves You"**

***18th on the Sermon Series on James***

***June 2, 2024***

James 3:13-18

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by [good] deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* This week as I was considering the difference between wisdom and logic and intelligence and so on. And I came across this directive from the British Admiralty at the time of the Second World War, and they posted this for those who were under their command regarding the storage of warheads. And this is what was posted for the soldiers: “It is necessary for technical reasons that these warheads should be stored with the top of the warhead at the bottom and the bottom at the top. In order that there may be no doubt as to which is the top and which is the bottom for storage purposes, it will be seen that the bottom of each [war]head has been labeled with the word TOP.” There it is Military logic at its best. They never fail to make something easy- complicated.  James continued to work to improve the community of faith he was establishing by equipping them with the wisdom necessary to grow in grace and knowledge of God.

I

And we know this because wanted to give them a **graceful word**. ***17****But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.****18****Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*            An active and dedicated hard working church member passed away. As he approached the Pearly Gates, he noticed a sign posted that read, “Entrance Requirement: 1,000 points.” When St. Peter appeared the man asked, “How do you get these points? St. Peter said, “Well what have you done with your life?” “Well,” said the man, “I have gone to church every Sunday for 32 years. I taught Sunday school for 12 years.” Well that gets to one point” said St. Peter. The man gulped and went on and said, “Well, I served on the finance committee, the building committee and the elder of the church. I set up chairs and ran errands for people and visited the sick. “Well”, said St Peter, “that is worth two more points.”          The man was perspiring by this time. He said, “I don’t know if anyone could ever get in to Heaven if that is the standard, except perhaps by the Grace of God.” At which point the doors of Heaven sprang open.     As believers in Jesus, we don’t do good things to get in God’s good graces. It is because we are saved by God’s grace that we do good things.  James is reminding the community of faith of *God’s grace*. Grace is about a priceless gift that was given to each of us -- a gift undeserved. But of course, that is why it is a gift.  Gifts can never be earned. Chesterton said it this way, "No one ever earned a sunset." That's it.  Gifts can never be earned; they can only be received or refused. It is the same with God's grace.  The word "grace" towers above all others in the Christian vocabulary.  It is very familiar word to many of us, perhaps too familiar.  We hear it frequently in the benediction at the end of a service of worship and sing it often in hymns. It is curious the way in which the gospel hymn "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound" is sung everywhere in the most unlikely places. Grace is the undeserved love of God: free, gratis and for nothing.” It is {*G}od’s  {R}iches  {A}t  {C}hrist’s  {E}xpense.* On the program 20/20 I watched a story about gifts of grace. Milton Petrie was a man with millions of dollars but far more grace. He was a man who reached out with and communicated his concern for others, desiring nothing in return.  He gave millions of dollars to people, who because of some tragedy or act of violence, needed help. At the same time, he didn't want any recognition for it.  Only now, after his death, has the truth of all he has done come out. Why didn't he want the recognition? Why did he do what he did? Simply he said, "Because, the Bible says."    As a police officer who was made a quadriplegic because of a violent act said,  “He enabled us to still be a family. To love each other and remain with each other." Or as the young model whose face was slashed by a knife, and whose future was forever altered said, "He saved me. He gave me back my life"   When Milton J. Petrie died at the age of 92, his lifelong pattern of generous giving continued. The newspaper headline reporting his death said: Millionaire's Death Doesn't Stop His Generosity. Petrie, the son of a Russian immigrant pawnshop owner, built his fortune with a chain of women's clothing stores. His will named 451 beneficiaries of his $800 million estate. Many recipients were faithful employees, some were personal friends, and others were people he had read about and decided to help through a difficult time.  Few of us have the monetary resources of Milton Petrie, but we have the same opportunities to give. People all around us need time, encouragement, financial help, compassion, friendship, and prayer.

II

The Word that improves you is a graceful word and also a **truthful word**. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace *and truth*."  ***17****But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.****18****Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*  As Jamie Buckingham has said, “The truth will make you free. But first it will make you miserable.” And he is right.  There were two lawyers who were waiting for the court to begin when one of them noticed an elderly lady he remembered. He said to her. “Do you remember me?” It was the wrong question. She said, “Yes, I remember you. You are the nasty boy I taught in grade two. You were mean then and you are mean now. You are nothing but a money grubbing lawyer and you are terrible to people. Yes, I know you.” A little shaken he pointed to the other lawyer and said, “Well, do you know him?” “Yes, I know him too. I baby sat him when he was a little boy. He always tried to run away from me. He was rotten to the core and mean to the other children and he still is. He has divorced two women and treated them miserably. He grinds people into dust and he is no good. Yes, I know him.” Right then the judge having listened to all of this pounded his gavel and called the two lawyers forward. And the judge said, “If either one of you ask that lady if she knows me. I will through you both in jail!”  A few weeks ago there was an article that took up nearly a full section of the newspaper that asked the question: "How do we communicate?"  In it, Professor Janice Priest, the professor of communications for Georgian College in Barrie said,  "It is important to consider two components in all types of communication--honesty and courtesy." "Honesty without courtesy can be too blunt and damaging.  Courtesy without honesty is as bad, or worse.  Sincere communication needs both components." Professor Janice Priest was right. "Honesty without courtesy can be too blunt and damaging.  Courtesy without honesty is as bad, or worse.  Sincere communication needs both component. I came across 5 questions to ask yourself before speaking using the acrostic T.H.I.N.K. Before responding, Is it True ? Remember this one rule about gossip: The juicier it is, the less likely it is to be true. Even if it is true, it can still fall under the category of gossip if you pass it on to someone else. Is it Helpful? Will your words help bring about a solution to a problem? Is it Inspiring? Will your words build someone up? Or will they only tear someone down and make the situation worse? Is it Necessary? Do you have to say anything at all? Is it Kind? Are you words based on a desire to help, or are you simply trying to fit in by sharing what you know.   Someone once said, "Grace is God's favor on those who do not deserve it and can not earn it.  If God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive, but He deals with us on the basis of grace and truth. Grace without truth would be deceitful, and truth without grace would be condemning. "      The Word that improves you is our Lord Jesus who deals with us both in grace and with truth.  The right word is a truthful word. God's Word is truth - truth that clears away the cobwebs in our conscious minds; truth that clears our conscience truth that clears our confusion.  Yet often we don’t want to hear the truth. We refuse it even when given with courtesy. The book The Tattoo Artist of Auschwitz just became a tv series. When I read the book I was struck by the moment when Lalie Sokolov a jew who willingly went to the train station to board a train because he believed the lie - as so many did- that they were going to help with the German war effort. But a German friend from school was in military uniform and when he saw Lalie, he said, “Lalie what are you doing here. Run, get your family and run you do not want to board that train.” Yet, he didn’t want to believe the truth. He accepted the lie and though he survived the concentration camp; his mother and father and brother and sister perished.

III

The Word that improves you is a graceful word and also a truthfulword and also, a **hopeful**word. He elevates them. ***17****But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.****18****Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*    I saw something the other day that was said first, by G. K. Chesterton. I saw it in of all places on a sign for an Insurance company. I hope they were trying to say something and not just trying to sell something.  The statement was, "Angels fly, because they take themselves so lightly."  Maybe if we sang with the joy of the angels, we'd be "lighter on our feet."   We live such serious lives. We need to not take ourselves so seriously, and start living freely. That is what children do. Isn't it? Isn't that what they do in the presence of their parents? They freely express joy, and sorrow. That is perhaps the way we are to be in the presence of God our Father. "Jesus, Himself, said, "You must be like a little child if you are to inherit the Kingdom of God."    Perhaps that is why children are so much like angels when they are little and seem so light on their feet. I have to say that it is true in my home. I don’t think I have ever seen any of my children walk through the house. They dance, twirl, hop skip and jump but rarely if ever walk. You see, children can take themselves so lightly because they rest in the security of their parents who love them, protect them and provide for them. And as believers who are the children of God, when did we stop believing that “God is our refuge and strength a very present help in times of trouble cast your burdens on the Lord and he will sustain you.” “Neither death nor life and angels or principalities or powers, nor things present or things to come shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want he maketh me to lie down in green pastures he restoreth my soul…” When did we stop believing it? When between childhood and adulthood did we stop believing that our Heavenly Father would provide for us, and be there for us sustain us and strengthening us. Perhaps that is why Jesus said you must become like little children – having that wisdom and freedom -if you are to enter the Kingdom of God. And James said, if there is any that are wise among you let that wisdom show forth in your life. You think about that.