**Written Copy: Who Has First Place in Your Heart: James 4:3-7**

Pentecost 18 Proper 20

Sunday September 23rd, 2018

**Text: James 4:3-7**

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or 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"? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**Exegetical Statement:**

James says that those who have true wisdom gained from experience living as Christians can best show it through their actions; after all faith w/o works is dead. But if that wisdom comes from a heart that is governed by selfish ambition, jealous of other’s gifts, the fruit will be to tear down the family of God instead of building it up. Godly wisdom exudes from the fruits of the spirit and seeks to impart peace which harvests right actions among those around us. But when our lives are governed not by godly wisdom but our selfish passions which only self-gratification the result is contention, strife, and quarrels: both with our fellow brothers and within ourselves as the sinful passions war against the godly nature being grown by the Spirit. We are dissatisfied because we don’t have our hearts desire, and when we pray for it God does not grant it because it would mean spending more or our time and energy on self-love instead of loving and worshiping Him. In this we are adulterers, we love ourselves and things of the world more than our Savior who died for us. But His Spirit given in Baptism yearns for us and will not easily let us go. He works to crush our proud sinful hearts by standing in opposition to our desires played out through action. He opposes them with the law not preached and uses that law preached to crush our proud hearts. Then He can reach out through the Gospel and lift us up to behold our Savior and His forgiveness

**Focus Statement:**

Christ loves us even when we don’t show our love for Him. He reaches out to us in the midst of our selfishness to crush our proud selfish hearts through His Word and through the law not preached to call us back to Him. When we are broken He lovingly restores us so that we once again can be living witnesses as His Church

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

James calls us adulterers. We are to love Christ above all else but instead share our love and devotion with the world and our worldly passions: those things through which we seek selfish gratification at the expense of our fellow brothers in Christ as well as our call to be a part of the Body of Christ and involved in it’s mission

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Commit our way to the Lord. Work with the Spirit to seek and destroy those parts of our lives that demonstrate a love for the world that stands against a life given in sacrifice to our Savior. Realize that our personal relationship with Christ has ramifications outside ourselves in either positively or negatively among our brothers and the lost.

**Subject Sentence: Christ wants first place in your heart**

There’s a story about a man who was at the breakfast table one morning drinking his coffee when his wife came up behind him and slapped him on the back of the head so hard that his nose hit the cup and spilled coffee all over him. He turned around and asked her: “What on earth did you do that for?” She showed him a slip of paper with the name “Marylou” on it. She said “I found this in your pants pockets. Who the heck is Marylou buster!” He said, “All right, I confess. I wasn’t working late last night, I went to the dog track. I know I promised you I wouldn’t. I lost $50 dollars betting on Marylou. She’s a dog.” His wife scowled at him and walked away. The next morning he was at the breakfast table and his wife walked up and punched him closed fisted on the cheek, knocking him to the floor. He looked back up at her and asked: “What the heck was that for?” She replied, “Your dog just called for you.”

It’s been said that most couples know when there is unfaithfulness going on. Of course there are the outward signs: when one’s partner is always working late or giving lame excuses for not being home, money mysteriously missing from the account, phone calls taken in another room. But there are more subtle signs that one’s partner picks up on. There is a difference in the love relationship and devotion shown by the spouse. Most of us are wired so that we can truly love only one person with our whole heart and our whole mind. When another enters the picture one of the two will get the short end of the stick. Sooner or later the spouse being cheated on finds out.

It’s in this vein that I bring to your attention the charge our Lord and Savior brings against us in our Epistle Reading. James starts out verse 4 (**James 4:4a**) “**You Adulterers!**” Now James is not accusing everyone in this room of cheating on their spouse. While the sins of the world do sometimes intrude upon the members of the Church I hope and pray this sin is not that widespread here. But James is using a metaphor from the Old Testament that was used by God to describe when His Covenant People Israel were unfaithful through their worship of false gods. Idolatry was described as adultery in God’s eyes. Just as the husband or wife is terribly hurt when their spouse has been unfaithful so too the LORD expresses the same emotions of hurt and anger. We as God’s Covenant people of the New Testament are called “The Bride of Christ”. As Paul describes in Ephesians 5 that we studied not too long-ago Christ loves us as a groom loves His precious bride. And we love Him because He first loved us and gave His life for us to make us good enough to be called His bride. How are we to live out that love? As Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship**.” Showing love to our Redeeming God should not be just an afterthought. As Jesus says in **Matthew 27:37-38** “**37 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment**.” Loving Him with all our heart, soul, and mind doesn’t leave much room to love anyone or anything else in the same way. All our other loves such as our spouse and our children and our friends should flow from this first great love.

So, how are you and I doing with this? James says we are Double Minded Adulterers. We relegate Him to second or third position, or maybe even lower. Who takes precedent then? James says its us. It’s our love of self and love of the world. We allow that Old Sinful Adam that is supposed to be drowned daily in our Baptism to have new life. We resurrect him and place him on the throne of our lives. We make the focus of our life be the desires of our heart, all those things we call needs that really aren’t. All the things that world says we need to have to be fulfilled and have meaningful lives. We forget that everything we have is a gift from God who is not only Creator but supplier of Daily Bread-daily needs. But instead of seeing these gifts rightly the Old Adam claims them as our own private property. We earned them and no one else can tell us what to do with them. These can include not just our stuff but our relationships and family. We can place them not as gifts from the Lord but as equal to the Lord or even higher than Him in importance. With that Old Adam ruling we can even see Jesus in the wrong light. We can see Him as the Savior whose death promises us the perfect American life: including the perfect job and the suburban home, and car, and wide screen TV and all the rest. We can see Him as the American Jesus who came to defend and protect our American way of life. But that’s not from Scripture. That’s from culture. That’s from the world. And James warns us: (**James 4:4b**) “**Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God**.”

When anyone or anything takes first place in our lives it makes us adulterers in God’s eyes. And what is the punishment in the Old Testament for adultery? **Leviticus 20:10** states "**If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.**” The punishment for spiritual adultery is spiritual death. But our Groom out of His great love for us couldn’t stand that thought of us His unfaithful bride being separated from Him forever. So He came to earth and He took that punishment for His. He died our spiritual death, so we would never have to. He endured on the cross the punishment of hell that we deserve for our unfaithfulness to Him. No longer does He calls us adulterers. Instead through His sacrifice He makes us His beautiful bride. And through His resurrection promises us a honeymoon that is beyond comprehension. Far greater than even that dream of the “Perfect American Life” we all strive for at times. It will begin on the Last Day and never end. And it all comes as His free gift. It came to Zoey this very morning. And it came to you and I through the faith we receive in Baptism. It’s through that gift that we are able to love Christ as He commands we do: “**with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”**

That gift from Christ changes us, changes our hearts. As **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** say: “**14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised**.” His love controls us because it removes the Old Adam from the throne and replaces him with the one who earned that right to rule through His death and resurrection. It’s painful when it happens. As James describes we are made to (James 4:9-10) “9 **Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you**.” He humbles us through the words of the Law that accuse us of being adulterers and then, with broken hearts raises us back up with His Words of love that are the Gospel Message. With Him ruling over our newly restored heart we can live in a new way, with new eyes and attitude about our life and the all the gifts He has given us to manage. We can live lives that are a living sacrifice to Him.

There is a story about a newlywed couple whose Wedding reception lasted much longer than anticipated. It made for a very long day. When they reach the bridal suite at the hotel they were exhausted and ready to collapse. But as they looked around the room seemed to be missing something very important. It has a nice mini kitchen, a dining room table, big screen HD TV. Several recliners and a sofa that doubled as a hide-a-bed. What was missing was the bridal bed. They were understandably disappointed but too tired to go back down to the front desk. The bride took the hide-a-bed which only had room for one comfortably and the groom collapsed in one of the recliners. The next morning they went down to the front guest to complain about this so-called bridal suite. The manager came back up to the room with them and asked them if they opened the door on the other side of the room. Behind that door laid the true bridal suite: a beautiful bed, a tray with snacks and appetizers, an even bigger HD TV, and a bottle of champagne on ice. It was there all the time for them, they just couldn’t see it.

The Holy Spirit given in Baptism works in our lives every day to restore us as Christ’s humble yet precious bride. He will withhold anything that would serve to separate us from the love that we have in Christ. And with Christ ruling in our hearts He turns our eyes to see all the ways we can show the love we have from Him to those in the world around us. He changes each one of us from adulteress into the faithful bride of Christ. And is working to move you and I to use some of what He has given us to do the same in the lives of those around us here and in the world. Amen.