

James 3:13 - 4:8

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

⁴Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, “God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” ³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Love in Action

What is something that you are afraid of? One thing that I'm afraid of is being wrong publicly. Of course I've been wrong many a time, and I am pretty comfortable being wrong privately, but when I say something or do something wrong that others see clearly I can hear them say to themselves, “The pastor was wrong,” I get upset, not at the person, not at the person who sees my fault, but at *myself*. I understand that God forgives me for my sins and my limitations; I guess I'm afraid that people won't. Today I'm going to talk to you about fear, how it constricts us, and how God's love *fre*es us. And my prayer is that you'll see how our faith is so connected to our capacity to love; the greater our faith, the

greater our love will be. And we'll pray that the Gospel may bring you to greater faith, which in turn will lead you to a greater love, for God, for yourself, and for others.

Love expresses itself in **action** – in caring and sharing, in giving, in being present for others, in listening when you want to talk, in forgiving even when it's hard for you. We may be able to say the right words, words that encourage and teach and express our concern, but you know that old saying, **"talk is cheap."** We need to "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk," and many people have a hard time walking that walk. For many, there is a disconnect between what we say and what we do, and between what we say and what we think. I think of how many times someone has said, "Sorry" to me, and my knee jerk reaction is to say, "No problem." But I'm not always sincere when I say that. Sometimes I go about grumbling; I say "no problem," but clearly there still **is** a problem, and it's **MY** problem because I've already told the other guy, "no problem." Why do I hold onto my anger so long? Sometimes I listen to someone and, in my mind I'm rolling my eyes and thinking, "this is really boring," even though it's important to that other person.

And what about my outward actions? How are they out-of-sync with my words? I can look at the plight of people I don't know, shake my head and say, "What a shame," but will I send in some money, or pick up the phone and call someone to see if I can help? I find myself quickly and easily distracted by something more personal, like web-surfing or shopping. I may pray for the poor and the sick and the oppressed, but when it comes to giving my time or money or other resources to address their needs I stop short. Talk is cheap, and prayer talk is no different. This is why I often pray *AT* God instead of *TO* God; I know God is listening, so I offer up a lot of words to him, and then I end the prayer so I don't hear God say anything to me. Why? Because I'm **AFRAID** of what I might hear. God might say something like, **"Matt, your words and deeds are not in sync."**

God wants us to live in-sync, for our words and thoughts and actions to be coordinated and integrated. He wants us to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. He created us in his image, and God is one who does what he says and says what he does. The Bible has so many stories of God's words fulfilled; When God says he's going to do something, he does it.

So if our words are not in sync with our thoughts and deeds, how can we fix that? The answer is FAITH, faith to follow God, wherever he may lead, because if we follow God we will live lives of integrity. That's what Jesus did; he followed God in every way, and the thought of following God wherever he leads is an idea that scares us. It scared the disciples. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus has just told the disciples what God wants him to do and that he's going to do it, that he will be betrayed into human hands and crucified and RESURRECTED. The last part sounds great – I'm all in favor of resurrection; it's the road leading to resurrection that I'm not too keen on; that road involves more than going to church; it involves suffering and death, two of our least favorite topics.

We're afraid to walk the road that leads through suffering and death, and so we compromise our faith in God. We say, "God, I will follow you *almost* anywhere." God I will give you...what I can afford to give you after I've paid my bills and taken my kids out for pizza and bought my lottery ticket and..." You see where I'm going. What gets me is that God gives us everything and he only asks that we give 10% back, but we're reluctant to give 2%. That is an expression of our level of faith and our level of fear, because the two are polar opposites; those with faith in God are not afraid to give, but those who lack faith are afraid to give.

And those who are afraid to give are limited in their ability to love. Faith and love are integrally linked; a person of strong faith is a person who has the capacity to truly love, and a person of no faith can only give what he's not afraid of losing, and without faith your fear is great and therefore how well can you love? We say we love, and it usually means that we are willing to do *something* for someone else. Are we able to do anything for someone else? Are we able to do everything for **everyone else?** That's what God's love is like, a love that doesn't spare suffering and death on a cross, and then forgiveness to everyone for all time. Jesus expresses divine love and faith not only in God but in us as well.

Today is Mya's baptism, and Mya is not able to verbally express her faith in God, but all of us will confess our faith, and it's not a faith in a cold doctrine but a faith in a warm, loving, living God. And we will also commit ourselves to love, to love Mya in particular, and to love her into faith, because you and I know that there are plenty of things in the world that we may be afraid of, but faith casts out fear, and faith is expressed in love. May God find in us a faith that encourages others in faith, that we may walk the walk that Jesus walked, and love one another fully and freely as God loves each and every one of us.