

James 3:13-18 (NRSV) ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But 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. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for^[a] those who make peace.

Mentoring in Faith

This morning we are continuing with our exploration of K.U.M.C.'s new Vision Statement. In the last two weeks, we have discussed the first two lines of that statement: **Knowing** Jesus Christ; and, **Uniting** a Community. Today, as I address line three, **Mentoring in Faith**, it gives me pause to think back to the mentors -- the spiritual role models in my own life. I hope you are considering the mentors who have influenced your life and faith development as well. Who were those mentors? Who are they now? Usually they are just ordinary people, who have an extraordinary impact on others around them. Why? Perhaps they cared when no one else seemed to care. Perhaps they shared wisdom gained from life experience. They may have been the ones who could rise above the fray of conflict and competitiveness. They were likely the ones in whom we could see a living faith in Jesus Christ, even when the circumstances of life were rough.

James, a pastor in the early Christian Church, was deeply engaged in helping his congregation to grow in faith, wisdom, and Christ-likeness, as we heard in today's scripture text. He understood that as sinners-seeking-righteousness gathered in his church, they would need to learn a new way of living, and how to sustain a continued deepening of faith-filled life. Most of us do that most effectively when we have wise, humble, accessible mentors and role models to inspire us.

Now, the realists among us will be quick to point out that none of us are truly up to the task of being a spiritual role model for the masses, because, as we know in our hearts, we all fall short of the glory of God in this life. Well, friends, I have good news. As Christ followers, we all have opportunities to mentor and inspire others. Sometimes it is through the wisdom we enact (as James would have put it), and at other times it is through the humble ways that we accept Christ's grace and try again after falling short dramatically.

Helen Keller once said, *"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble."* Through our humility, we highlight the power of Christ to use the ordinary for extraordinary purposes!

So, it has been said that Mentoring is the way of discipleship! When we look at the word of God, we see repeatedly where God's faithful ones are linked with another for

the purpose of mentoring. Examples from scripture would include Elijah and Elisha, David and Jonathan, Naomi and Ruth, and ultimately the disciples and band of those who followed Jesus. Jesus called folks one by one and mentored & disciplined them so that they could go forth and serve as mentors and leaders in the church.

Mentoring is a process where a wiser and more experienced person assists another person to grow and learn – in our case – in the faith. Mentoring is also a learning partnership, involving commitment, open communication, confidentiality, and risk-taking. A mentor is **not** directive, but rather listens, questions, challenges, provides feedback, options, some guidance and counsel. A mentor may point out gifts, skills and potential in another that they have not recognized in themselves. Thus the one being mentored may begin a new path of developing faith through study, servanthood, and giving of one's self.

Wow, you may be thinking that one needs to have all of their proverbial stuff together – developed some perfection – before they can serve as a mentor. Well, that is **not** really the case! In my own life, those who were the most effective mentors and role models, were those that I observed in a learning and growing mode. They were life-long learners who had not yet “arrived!”

Rev. Sarah Miller was one such person. She had a deep spirituality, was wise and humble, loved learning new things, and was always trying to lift others up through her gracious spirit. She was the first woman D.S. in the former Wyoming Conference. For a while she was my superintendent. One fall, I invited Sarah and a couple of other guests to have dinner at the parsonage prior to our annual charge conference. In addition to salad and garlic bread, I made lasagna, and prepared my aunt's recipe for apple crisp. Well it was one of those days when everyone was running late. While waiting for the arrival of our guests, the lasagna ran over in the oven, filling the house with smoke. So, minutes before Sarah's arrival I swooped through the house opening windows and lighting every candle I could find to hopefully cover up the odor. Upon entering the house, Sarah never mentioned the obvious aroma of supper burning. She complimented me on the ambiance created by the lit candles. We shared dinner together, and when dessert time rolled around, the apple crisp had cooled. So I put it into the microwave for a while of warming ... too long of a while. The crispy topping became so rock hard that the melting ice cream topping did not even soften it. Sarah's comment, “What an interesting combination of textures and flavors!”

I thought our dinner together was a dismal failure. But as Sarah opened the Charge Conference a little while later at the church, she made sure to note that she had experienced warm and loving hospitality at the parsonage as we shared a meal together. She was so gracious and kind, when the truth could have been brutal!! A couple of years later I observed Sarah journey through the tragic death of both of her sons in two separate accidents. In circumstances of life powerful enough to crush even one of deepest faith, Sarah, even when overcome with human outbursts of grief, always leaned on Christ for strength and healing.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases James' words by saying:

“Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, ... You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God

and enjoys its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.”

So this is an invitation to re-imagine what mentoring, as a practice of humble greatness, looks like in our church. This includes re-imagining the kind of church leadership that intentionally cares about the ongoing spiritual formation of the next generation of church and community leaders. This Mentoring in Faith will also cultivate our capacity to develop disciples of Christ who share authentic leadership. We can do this by:

- ✿ Creating a safe space for Christians to explore their vocation in the world;
- ✿ Spending more time asking provocative questions, rather than giving patent answers;
- ✿ Modeling what greatness really looks like in Jesus’ ministry;
- ✿ Welcoming the voices and vocations of young people in the community;
- ✿ Expanding our community to include those who feel voiceless; and,
- ✿ Making those at the margins of our community the new centers of congregational care.

Again, James’ teachings as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson:

“Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here’s what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It’s the way you live, ... that counts.”
Amen.