

## ***Wisdom from Above***

James 3:13-4:3

The Reverend Doctor Michael Newheart

September 19, 2021

Today is Just Peace Sunday, which is an observance of the UCC. When I think of "Just Peace," I think of my late mentor Glen Stassen, who did more than anyone to popularize the phrase "Just Peace," or as he preferred "Just Peacemaking." I don't remember him, though, ever teaching us how to make light come out of our fingers.

Today's sermon is entitled "Wisdom from Above," and I'm going back to James, which I began with back in August. Do you remember August? I don't either.

Oh, that we would have wisdom from above, to help us through the pandemic, to help us make it through this bridge period. Oh, oh, oh.

James is often considered Christian wisdom literature. Wisdom is usually associated with the books of Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Proverbs.

James, perhaps the brother of Jesus but probably not, contrasts the wisdom from above with wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. This wisdom from below is bad stuff. It's got envy, selfishness, disorder, and wickednesssssss. BWahahahaha. It sounds like it's ready for Halloween, like all the stores in Blue Back Square.

Wisdom from above, that is, wisdom from God, wisdom from within, is gentle, pure, peaceful, merciful, and fruitful. In other words, it's mmm -mmm good!

So, what do you want? The wisdom from above or the wisdom from below? The wisdom that comes from the inside, from interiority, from the depths of one's being or the wisdom that comes from out there, where Satan dwells and where empire reigns. Take your choice, says James.

I would like to talk about the wisdom from above in three ways.

First, the wisdom from above involves awareness, awareness. Awareness of what?

Awareness of the war within. James 4:1 says: "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?"

This slide is of a drawing I did entitled, "warring cravings." I'm really not crazy about the translation "cravings." One might translate it as "desires or longings." What do you crave? What do you desire? What do you long for? And this longing is of God. And so is the warring. All is of God. Which leads to the second point: The second point is that the wisdom from above is acceptance. Acceptance.

Octavia Butler, late science fiction writer said, "We give lip service to acceptance, as though acceptance were enough. Then we go on to create super-people - super-parents, super-kings, and queens, super-cops - to be our gods and to look after us - to stand between us and God. Yet

God has been here all along, shaping us and being shaped by us in no particular way or in too many ways at once like an amoeba - or like a cancer. Chaos.”<sup>1</sup>

Which leads to the third point: Wisdom from above is anxiety-free. Anxiety-free, that is without anxiety. Many of us suffer from anxiety disorders. No wonder that the book for discussion next month is *ANXIOUS PEOPLE*.

As ministers (which we all are), we are to cultivate a non-anxious presence, which is pretty hard to do at times, like all the time. But as we seek the wisdom from above we cultivate and sow and plant and water and harvest.

What are some meditative spaces, prayerful practices, contemplative activities here at First Church?

One of my favorites is the labyrinth, in which you meditatively walk, grounding yourself in the wisdom from above, step by step inch by inch.

Another of my favorites is the J. P. Webster Library, my home away from home here in West Hartford, where there are all kinds of books, all kinds of activities, all kinds of programs, all kinds of people that can help foster your wisdom from above (your WFA), along with others, in community. You don't have to go it alone.

You see to the far right one of those programs, which is filled, the Wallace Stevens program. Also the used book sale in a few days. Also music can be a way to God, a way to nurture the WFA. We have a piano recital. And of course worship.

All are geared to promoting the church's slogan: "Living in the Spirit, Committed to Service, Open to All."

All these spaces, activities, and practices are to enable us to be silent together. Worshiping God in spirit and in truth. Here I want to distinguish between being silent and being silenced. One is a choice, the other is not.

Calvin Trillin is a Kansas Citian who has migrated to NYC. He says that the motto of the Midwest is "no big deal." For me, I think that that is gospel. So are these words from the late medieval mystic Julian of Norwich. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

The wisdom from above enables us to breathe, to say "ah!" Ah-men.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7630691>