

## “Strive To Do The Will Of God”

James 3:13—4:10

As we have begun confirmation class for our youth, I am always interested in reading their sermon notes. What did they hear? That is the point of that exercise; I have them write the sermon notes as a way of teaching them to listen to the preaching of the Word of God. So what did they hear? Last week, I mentioned how we are not perfect, we are made complete in Christ.

And I emphasized “I am not a perfect pastor; I am not a perfect husband, or father, or friend.” My daughter Julianna’s sermon notes really emphasized that portion of the sermon – underlined, highlighted. And she is completely accurate to do so. And our Scripture readings today drive home this point even more.

Last week, we heard James the brother of our Lord tell us of how much damage we can do using our words. “The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness . . . How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire.” And. Last week, as I said repeatedly, I am not perfect in my use of words. No matter how great a length a person goes to never say anything that would offend anyone, you will never speak perfectly because you will never be able to speak the perfect balance of Law and Gospel to every person God places in your path.

The same is true of what we hear this week from James. Regardless of how hard we try, there is jealousy and selfish ambition in our hearts. This is why there are quarrels and fights, even among the people of God. Your passions, the desires of your heart, the coveting of what others have, friendship with the world – all these things separate us from God. James goes so far as to say that anyone who wishes to be a friend with the world makes himself an enemy of God.

There is only one solution to this. We hear it in Jesus' words, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

Just like last week I told you that we are not perfect, we are made complete in Christ. All of the struggles, quarrels, fights, unholy passions, desiring that which does not belong to you, friendship with the world – all these burdens of sin and guilt have been carried to the cross. Christ died for you. Christ died for all the people with whom you quarrel and fight.

The Gospel, the grace of God is complete and free. However, this does not give you the right to go out and do as you please. Wishing to be a friend of the world makes you an enemy of God. Notice that intent is involved. We are all somewhat friendly with this sinful world. Again, since Adam's fall, Jesus is the only person who had the option of being perfect.

We all exhibit friendliness with the world around us. No one fulfills the demand of the Law to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. No one fully loves all of their neighbors the same as

they love themselves. When was the last time you walked into Starbucks or Sprouts and paid for everyone?

Even if you would empty yourself of all of your possessions, your salvation would still only be found in the grace of God. You would still only be counted among the righteous because “the Son of Man [was] delivered into the hands of men, and they killed Him.” Even if you lived like Mother Theresa of Calcutta, you would only have the hope of life after death because the Son of God, after three days, rose from the dead.

So, if God’s grace is upon me even though I continue to sin, why not just have the “best of both worlds?” I can do what I want during the week, and I can come and seek and receive God’s grace – hear His Absolution, partake of the body and blood of the Son of God broken and shed for my sin. Then I can go out and live like I want and do what I want the rest of the week, and then come back here and ask for forgiveness all over again – knowing that God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As the old saying goes, “It is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission.”

The seeking and receiving of God’s grace is a necessary part of life. But as we heard James say two weeks ago, “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” As we hear him say today: If you wish to be a friend to the world, you have made God your enemy.

He does not desire to be your enemy. As James says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us.” He desires to keep what is rightfully His. You are His child. He wants to be gracious

toward you. Therefore, as a loving child, submit yourselves to His authority, to His will.

Have the desire to do the will of God – even though you will not do this perfectly. Intend to do it. Strive to do it. Resist the devil. Do not desire to be friends with the world. James says, “Your passions are at war within you.” If there is no fight against those passions and unholy desires, then the war is over. This is what James means when he says, “Faith without works is a dead faith.”

Strive to do the will of God. Greet each day with the intention to be His witness to all who God places in your path.

This year in Confirmation class, we are beginning with Baptism. In his catechism, Luther asks the question, “What does such baptizing with water indicate?” He answers, “It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Our life is a continual cycle of coming before our Lord, confessing our sin “by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault” and knowing that as a Baptized child of God I am clean.

And in thanks for what Christ has done: being delivered into the hands of men, being killed, and three days later rising from the dead; we humbly come before the Lord and strive to give thanks. As incomplete and shallow as our thankfulness is for all that He has done, He willingly claims you to be His child. And as your true Father, He calls you by name. Amen.