



GPS GUIDE: JULY 11, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Envy

James 3: 13-18

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

Monday: Read Genesis 25: 19-34

I have watched many brothers and sisters hurt each other. I have ministered to wounds still open years after vicious battles. And even when relationships among brothers and sisters have created many blessings, relationships may go awry and cause unbearable pain. When love and care are abused or withheld, the damage can crush the spirit. Norman J. Cohen suggests that reconciliation between Jacob and Esau is possible because they are part of each other's identity. They are like two halves of a whole, and each needs what the other has. Esau needs the patience and forethought of Jacob, while Jacob needs the position and strength of Esau. Each is identified by his relationship with the other. They can never escape their bond. How does scripture address the brokenness in our relations with family? Even though envious sibling rivalry is not a given, the possibility of it haunts our lives and our hopes for joy and blessing. This is why envy is one of the seven deadly sins. In Romans 8, however, there is good news. Paul explains that the flesh cannot have the last word about us if we walk in the spirit of Christ. If we put sibling conflict into the category of "sin in the flesh," then it is a sin from which "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set [us] free." When Paul speaks of "sin in the flesh," he's referring to that capacity in all human life to turn from God. He is speaking of those ways in which human life is so mired in sin that it is unable

on its own steam to set things right and be reconciled fully with God. The kind of sibling conflict that crushes the spirit and leaves battle wounds can be healed, Paul would say, in "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." For it has set us free from all that destroys and kills. Have you experienced or witnessed sibling rivalry? How has God worked in and through family brokenness?

Prayer: My biblical family reminds me that we are not perfect. Help me to shed envy as I live in Christ's love. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 16: 1-6

Since Hagar was a slave girl, she was at the beck and call of her mistress, Sarah. One commentary says this: "When Sarah came up with the idea to give Hagar to her husband Abraham to have the child that she couldn't seem to conceive, Hagar didn't really have a choice but to obey. Once Hagar conceived, she finally possessed something that Sarah didn't have, and Sarah became jealous. Being unwilling to face the consequences of her own decision to give Hagar to Abraham to bear his child, Sarah appealed to Abraham, who handed Hagar over to the jealous Sarah. Sarah immediately began to treat Hagar harshly, wreaking vengeance on Hagar for her disrespect."

Even though the plan had been Sarah's idea, when it came down to it, Sarah's envy got the better of her. She drove Hagar away, into the wilderness. Sometimes our plans turn out other than we imagined, and we are left having to grapple with our feelings of hurt or envy. When have you found yourself envious of someone you helped place in a position of honor or power? Do you think God can use those difficult situations for good? What might free you from the prison of envy so you can celebrate with others?

Prayer: Grant me the courage, O God, to recognize other's accomplishments without being overcome by jealousy. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Mark 9: 30-37

The disciples are thick-headed. Or at least that's the impression Mark portrays by their conversation. I mean, can there be any other reasonable explanation for the content of their conversation immediately in the wake of Jesus' harrowing description of what following him entails? We shake our heads in confusion or disbelief at their seemingly silly argument. And then we look again, and we see ourselves mirrored back, don't we? Much of life as we live it now can be experienced as competition as to "who is best." Or at least "better." We measure ourselves over and against one another as we seek to discern a pecking order. But what if we lived more by an "all in this together" kind of thinking? That surely is at least part of Jesus' point in the passage. Those disciples are *all in this together*, even as we are, regardless of where we come from or where we are going. It is not about who is greatest. Except to say that Jesus was just that, and we know his way of living that *greatness* was radically different from what the world normally measures as great. No, it is not about who among us is greatest. Indeed, it never

really was. What do you make of the disciples' argument? How and where do you see us reflected in them today? What examples in the world do you see of being 'last of all and servant of all' as Jesus was and is? How does that help you understand this scripture? How might living in the way Jesus calls us to change the world?

Prayer: O Lord, continue to teach me to cooperate rather than compete so that I may join with other faithful followers to serve others in your name. Amen.

Thursday: Read Psalm 139: 1-18

This beautiful psalm narrates a religious encounter with God that affirms our human worth. It invites what may be called *celebratory education*: That which builds up our knowledge of the faith found in scripture and leads us out to live with assurance of our valued identity. This is good news that prompts both individual and communal celebration! Each of us becomes an instrument of the truth of our God given value and love by what we say and do that mirrors the beauty of God's handiwork in our lives. Our identity is not defined by negative names that others may give us (or that we may give ourselves) that diminish our true identity. Our valued identity is found in the God who created us, knit us together, and loves us. Have you ever been called names that diminished your worth? Have you ever thought of yourself as not worthy of God's love? How does this psalm help you recognize your holy identity? Make a list of positive names or attributes that God has created in you.

Prayer: I praise you, O God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made! Amen.

Friday: Read John 13: 1-35

This entire passage, which is about love, ends with a new commandment to love one another, and it has left me with questions – lots of questions – so I pose them for your thinking today. First, do we take seriously that love is at the center of the faith? On the one hand, I suspect we do. "For God so loved the world..." most of us can recite. On the other hand, many conversations I've had with Christians over the years have made me wonder what other things vie as candidates to be the center of our faith: law, justice, knowing and doing God's will. All of these are important, of course, but as the Apostle Paul once said (and as we sang in our closing hymn on Sunday), absent love, none of these other things amounts to a hill of beans.

Second, even if we know and believe that love is at the heart of things, why do we sometimes find it so hard to love? Who do we have the hardest time loving? Is it people who are different from us? People who have hurt us? People who see things differently? Who? I think this is a question we don't often ask but probably should, particularly when the question of who's in and who's out seems to drive our cultural thinking and widen the divide.

Third, when we do love others well, what is that like? And, just as much, when we feel loved by someone – accepted for who we are, valued, honored, even cherished – what is that like? How does it change our lives? What might we learn from these experiences that can help us share our love with others more fully? Jesus, on the night he shared a last meal with his disciples, gave a new commandment. Love one another. Love is at the heart of who we are as Jesus' followers. How can we love more fully?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to love one another that your love will continue to grow in our lives, in our church, in the world. Amen.

Saturday: Spiritual Practice

Make a list of people toward whom you are envious. Can you think of why you harbor the dangerous vice of envy toward them? Offer a prayer of confession to God for your envy and ask God to help release you from it. Read Psalm 139 again and remember God's holy love for you. God created you special and you don't have to compete with anyone to receive God's love.

Make a list of the ways you feel love from others. When you look at the list, does it reflect the love of Jesus to you? How can you show those kinds of loving behaviors to others? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the love you know and ask God to strengthen you to love others with the unconditional love of Christ. Make a copy of John 13: 34-35 and put it somewhere you can see it as daily reminder to intentionally practice love.



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