

Earlier this week, I was sitting in an intensive care unit waiting room. I know the television was on, but I don't think anyone was watching it. Well, they might have been looking at it, but I don't think anyone was really paying attention to it. Instead, most of the people in the room were watching Wednesday.

She was walking around the room singing. She would go up to random strangers and just start singing different songs to make them smile. Once they smiled she would smile back and move on to the next person who looked sad. It was an ICU waiting room, so there were plenty of people to go around.

The waiting room also served as a hallway, so people were coming and going through it all the time. At one point, this woman in scrubs walked through with a very determined look on her face and stopped and looked at Wednesday before she left.

About 10 minutes later, she came back into the room with the same expression. This time she didn't stop and look at Wednesday. Instead she opened the door, took a step out and stopped. She turned around and came back into the room and started walking up to me.

I was expecting her to tell me to settle Wednesday down. We were in a hospital and that was no place for her kind of behavior. But, instead she said thank you. She told us that more people needed that kind of joy in their lives. People needed to be reminded that even though everything seemed to be at its worst, there was still happiness out there.

I kept thinking about that as I read this week's scripture. In our reading today, James tells us about God's wisdom. He tells us how it gets passed on to us, but inevitably we are the ones that either accept it or pervert it in our own human ways.

The letter from James was named after the originator of the letter. Unlike Paul's letters that were named after the church they were sent to, James' letter was meant to be read for all displaced Jews and Gentiles that were a part of the beginning church. Based on identifiers in the letter, this is Jesus' brother James and his followers and not the apostle James, John's brother.

In our reading today, James starts off talking to us about God's wisdom and how pure and gentle it is. When we adhere to his wisdom, our life is good and great things happen. But, instead we are driven by our own greed and envy. These ambitions are not given to us by God, instead they are earthly and evil.

So many times in life, we are at odds with our own inner demons. Personally, I struggle with my own self doubt, envy, and ambitions. And it is hard to set those aside. I was talking with a friend this week and he said something about someone that I get compared with frequently. I instantly shut down and started judging myself against that person and said something against that person. I didn't listen to what that person was trying to tell me.

We get mad because things do not go how we want them to. We are blinded by our own wants and desires, and not the wisdom that God gives us. Frequently I am asked, why God didn't give someone what they prayed for. In the bible it says, if you pray for something and believe it, God will give it to you. But, people pray all the time and do not get what they want. Does that mean that prayer doesn't work?

James tells us no, prayer does work, it is us that have asked wrongly. We pray to win the lottery or to get something we desire. But instead we should be praying for wisdom, patience, or resolution. We pray to win the lottery, why? We just want more money, or to quit our job, or we want to use part of the money to help a cause. Instead we should be praying on how we resolve our issues with our job or what we can do to bring more awareness to the cause. The opportunity is that we pray for pleasure and quick answers, not that we doubt God.

James uses a lot of strong language in this letter. He talks about committing murder and adultery as well being a friend to the world is being an enemy of God. He uses these points because he has taken them from the old testament. He isn't talking about the acts themselves, but he is trying to remind his readers about what was written in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Proverbs.

Many of our problems come from us forgetting God's wisdom that he bestowed on us. We forget his pure and gentle kindness, because we get self absorbed and turn our backs on his wisdom because we focus on our own wants and desires. We forget what it is like to be a child.

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." We do not need to boast about our accomplishments, He knows what we have done and what we are going to do. Once we accept God's wisdom, we won't need his recognition because we know that he has already given it to us. We will see our prayers being answered because we will not be praying for material needs but for spiritual needs. His wisdom will guide us and deliver us more than we will ever be able to do for ourselves.

Heavenly Father, you have sent us Jesus to mend that which is broken, to bridge that which is alienated, and to heal that which is diseased. In his name our troubled hearts speak to you, God, of those many people whose needs are great and whose comforts are few.

We speak to you of our concern for places where there is conflict, violence, and misery: war ravaged countries, domestic cruelty, bullying in school grounds, workplace intimidation, gang warfare on streets, or terrorist attacks.

Loving God, hear our prayers,

We speak to you of our concern for all displaced people: in refugee camps, fugitives from oppression, and for all separated families and traumatized children.

Loving God, hear our prayers,

We speak to you of our concern for neighbors, friends, or members of our own families who are 'doing;' the unemployed and the disabled, some fighting terminal illness, others in despair from broken relationships, some grieving a death, many caught up in predicaments for which there seems no obvious answer.

Loving God, hear our prayers,

We speak to you of our concern for the church: with its flourishing or weak congregations, some living in comfort and others surviving under persecution, some filled with self doubts and some with over self-confidence, churches without priests and ministers or those where sadly there is conflict between clergy and laity.

Loving God, hear our prayers,

We speak to you now loving God of ourselves: Help us, in our own small way, to be more like your compassionate Christ. Shape our thoughts, sift our feelings, supervise our efforts, bless our abilities, that we may get the best out of each day and give the best to those around us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen