

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of September 27, 2009*

## Let God Be God (James 4:1-12)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from the fourth chapter of James. Our Lord says to us:

"Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up."

This is the Word of God.

Friends in Jesus, today I would like to talk to you about the dandelion, those pesky things that pop up on lawns everywhere. Some characteristics about the dandelion are that they have very deep roots, sometimes up to three feet deep. Also, their seeds can get in the tiniest of cracks and grow in unexpected places like gravel or sidewalk cracks. Dandelions are hard to kill as well. If they are not pulled up by the root then the problem is not solved and they keep coming back with a vengeance. When dandelions are ignored and not removed they multiply fast. They are persistent and hard to uproot.

Now why am I talking about dandelions? Because dandelions share some of the same characteristics as people. Our text says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble". The dandelion is like the pride of the soul.

And pride is the granddaddy of all sins. Luther called it the head and heart of sin. It was pride that led Satan to rebel against God and try to overthrow Him. Satan's desire to be the one on the throne is what led him to be kicked out of heaven. And Satan continues his rebellious ways in this world. In the Garden of Eden he tempted Eve to be like God and eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And today, we are tempted in the same way to be a god to ourselves and submit to no one but ourselves.

Like the dandelion pride has deep roots in the soul. If we could solve the problem of pride we could solve all sins.

Friends, there is enough room for only one to be on the throne of heaven and earth. God is the creator of all things and He alone sits on that throne. He is clearly in charge. We know this. It seems obvious. But what happens when we put ourselves on the throne? On the surface this seems absurd - to challenge God as the Ruler of all things. He is Almighty; He is all-knowing and He is the Potter; we are the clay. And yet, this deep seed of pride in us is persistent.

The truth is by nature, we don't take direction very well. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done" and yet we have trouble accepting that God has the last word on things. We tend to want to be the one in charge and in control of things. We have this innate desire to control and yet we forget that when we let go of that control and submit to God and let Him truly be the King of our lives then He gives us His peace.

Our text says, "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Most of us I'm sure do not like this word 'submit' very much. To submit can seem confining and restrictive. It tends to carry with it a negative connotation. In a martial arts match, for example, to submit means to give up, to surrender and lose. And yet by submitting to God we don't lose – we win. Submitting to God is entrusting ourselves to His care. If we resist Him we leave ourselves open to the devil's attack.

James doesn't hold back in his book. It is addressed to Christians like us today. He says to us, "Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded". These are commands from God. Psalm 24 also says, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart". Clean hands - not hand sanitizer but a purity of life - and a pure heart – a purity inside and out. Who of us can say we have a pure heart every moment of the day with no evil thoughts whatsoever even one time? Do we have trouble letting go of anger, or forgiving someone?

The Lord invites us to come to Him. He makes us pure. He gives a clean heart. The blood of Jesus washes away the sin. He invites us to the cross, to come before Him as humbled and broken so through the merits of Jesus He may lift us up and heal us with His forgiveness.

God gives grace to the humble, as Scripture says. This means humbleness in relationship to Him. To humble ourselves before the Lord means to admit we need His help. And friends, we need the Lord not just in times of crisis but everyday even in seemingly ordinary things. Every breath we take is a result of God willing us to be alive. He is in complete control.

And He wants us to rely on Him for everything we do. He wants us to begin the day in prayer and Bible study and devotion and commend ourselves to Him. When a difficulty comes our way He wants us to pray not just as a last resort but as soon as the difficulty comes our way so He may guide us through it. Some may say, "God knows what I need so why do I need to ask for it?" This is true. God knows our needs even better than we know our needs and His way of providing is through the faith He gives us. God uses the trials that come our way as an opportunity to draw us closer to Him and teach us to exercise our God-given faith and rely on His grace in Jesus Christ.

God is good. He wants to give good things to us and He wants to be our Guide in everything we do but if our mind is set on only our own things and we are tuned out to God's Word then we will not be walking with Him. James says, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." Friends, God is not far away. He speaks to us in His Word; we speak to Him in prayer. It's a two-way communication.

Jesus implores us to come to Him for all things, both little and small. He says, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). Our pride wants us to be on the throne but it is in our best interest and to His glory to have the King of Kings on the throne of our lives.

When our heart is right before God then it will be right toward our neighbour as well. In Christ we have a Saviour that is full of grace and mercy. When we come to Him in sincere humbleness and repentance He forgives. Friends, we can rely on Him not just because we are commanded to but because we want to. In Jesus and His sacrifice we see the ultimate sign of God's love, that He would come down to earth to become one of us to die for our sins so we could live with Him forever. This is true love from God.

And because He forgives us we can then forgive whatever sins someone else may have done to us. It's not always a simple 1, 2, 3 though is it – oftentimes it's a struggle to forgive and that's when we need to remind ourselves who is on the throne and that we are saved by grace alone.

Friends, God is good and He gives good things. He is near us in the Word and Sacraments. He is near to give us grace for what we need in our day-to-day life and in the life to come. Later we will sing one of the communion hymns, Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated Lord to Thee. What a beautiful prayer! It's a prayer to commend ourselves into God good care and have Him use us as He pleases. May the love of Jesus guide you in all your works both large and small and may His grace lead us always humbly in His service. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.