

Growing up, the cool kids called me “book smart.” This was opposed to “street smart.” I wasn’t offended by this, as I knew I got good grades and I was happy with that and honestly I didn’t want to be great at anything that was involved in street smarts—drugs or alcohol, fighting; no thanks; I was happy with my safe, book-smart life.

But I think that is where I first heard of different intelligences—now I see it all over the place. Some are great at math, others get words in a way that I cannot even comprehend. Some people understand people—what they are thinking and feeling and what they need, often even better than the other people themselves. Others have a green thumb, a knowledge of how to keep plants alive, or when exactly to plant and harvest crops in order to see the best yield. Some people wrestle with philosophical thought while others are excellent at handling the concrete—physical materials or visual spaces or art supplies. These different intelligences make the world a beautiful place—they can certainly guide a person to find where they fit best in life.

But no matter which way you are smart, James defines for us two wisdoms—different from intelligences. He puts forth two ways in which we can utilize our smarts, our talents, our lives.

The first wisdom is from below. It is a wisdom that this earth has cultivated and has become the norm; typically this is what is praised and in fact comes naturally

to us. This wisdom seeks its own good. It is characterized by selfish ambition and jealousy. This wisdom seeks to take care of its own, no matter the cost of the other

It's most clearly seen in the concept of the survival of the fittest—the strongest, smartest, and best survive while they watch those who cannot maintain their lives fall down around them. The only time you might serve another is if that would be beneficial to you in the end. You care for children so that they might one day care for you; you might give to a charity if they'll scratch your back in return, or it you get an excellent tax return.

While this strategy of life, this form of wisdom, can be effective at keeping you alive, assuming you are among the fittest, its ultimate end is destruction—of others, of the community, and in the end, of the self, because even if you have the biggest brain, biceps, and bank account today, those facts will all one day come crumbling down and the fittest today will become feeble tomorrow.

The other wisdom is from heaven above and just as down is the opposite of up, the wisdom from above turns wisdom from below entirely on its head

Rather than seeking its own good, wisdom from above puts others above itself. It does good works in order to serve the neighbour instead of building itself up. All things it does in humility, not seeking praise from others but merely wishing to help and remain invisible through it all. James tells us that the end of this wisdom, the end of caring for others for their sake, is peace and righteousness.

This harvest of wisdom is most clearly seen in Wisdom Himself, Christ our Lord. The Word which was spoken in the beginning to create all that exists, the Wisdom which causes the sun to rise in the morning and set at night, the wisdom which forms clouds and tells them when to send forth their rain, the wisdom which stitches together a baby in a womb and has guided doctors in their goal to sustain life, this eternal, all powerful, all knowing, ever present God, took flesh in the person of Christ, the Son of God, in order to serve.

He knows all things and comprehends everything in its entirety. He lacks no intelligence, but also His wisdom is perfect, and He demonstrated in His life—His actions and His words, and in His death—that real wisdom serves, the truest wisdom seeks the good of the other, even giving itself up for the other.

He who deserves the highest status, allowed Himself to be humiliated—the uncreated taking on created flesh, the God of the universe having His diaper changed and relying on His parents, as if someone had to take care of Him. And then He allowed Himself to be mocked, to be questioned, to be called upon by those who would disregard Him; He hurt, He bled, He wept and cried out in sorrow. He did all this to raise up the humble, to lift up the downtrodden, to remember the forgotten, to redeem the irredeemable, to care for you. He, the highest of all, sunk lower than even the sinful mankind which had despised Him, which would seek to cut Him down, in order that He might raise us up, here in life and again in eternity.

The goal of all this Wisdom is peace—peace for the individual, and peace for the World. In His humiliating passion, Christ reversed the status, ignoring the wisdom of the world which cherishes the powerful and the prominent, undoing these values, trampling them under feet, in order that He might bring peace.

The wisdom of the world brings pain and torture, sin and death: Christ took the brunt of these consequences as the powerful brought about His passion. The wisdom from above, Christ Himself brings comfort and relief, forgiveness and life itself. Wisdom died on the cross, humiliated and alone, in *the* peace-giving action. By His life and by His death and by His resurrection to life again, He has gifted us with peace. Peace for you, as you are now reconciled to the God whom you once denied, ignored, spoke back to, disobeyed, the God who offered us life and we all put to death. But by that death, peace was won for us. For you, for me, for every human who has ever been conceived on this planet.

And Jesus, this Wisdom incarnate, has set forth this heavenly form of wisdom for us to adopt as well. He didn't humble Himself to save us on the cross so we could just continue in the wisdom of the world, seeking our own good and ignoring others; no as His hands and feet we are to live in His humble, others-serving weak-wisdom. But just as Jesus had to teach this status reversal over and over again, James as one of the first bishops of the church saw it and had to work against worldly wisdom and we too see it today. We are still double-minded, trying to be friends with God and

friends of the world. For as long as we walk this earth, it is our nature to turn back to ourselves, to please ourselves, to protect ourselves, to ensure a future for ourselves. And because this is the case, James wrote to the leaders of the early church in order to protect their faith, their Church, their lives. He warned them of the implosion and destruction that is bound to happen when each person looked out for themselves.

The reality of this church, a group filled mostly with Christian Jews, was that there were pagans around them who enticed them to try out their religion, and Romans who pressured them to live in line with the culture. There were Jews around, who wanted them to return from Christianity to their roots, their culture, their religion. And so there were temptations to turn to this idea and temptations to protect yourself by adopting this ideology or faith. But James constantly pointed them back to Christ, who served them, who has called them to humility in serving others. Their own ideas are not what are to guide them, but instead the Word of God. They are to humble themselves before the God who humbled Himself, and in doing so they receive His love and His care, His guidance and His protection—not that humbling ourselves earns this or is the final piece of His work, but this is simply how we receive what He has accomplished

James lays down the law, pointing out situation after situation that we all too often find ourselves in and showing that these are the results of worldly, demonic wisdom. And we too are in the same position—there is pressure on the church to

becomes more like the culture around us, and it would make life so much easier if we just fit in. And so some in the church try and dominate and push this idea—albeit sometimes with the earnest goal of growing the church. And then there is the ever-present temptation to seek out what makes me, the individual, feel good, feel safe, feel like I matter and today others push for this idea as well thinking that what makes me feel good must be best for all of us here. But both of these directions are not truly where we are called. We are called to submit to Christ and His teaching, His doctrine, His Law and His grace. And we can do this because these are full of His promises that He will care for us even if the Church seems to be shrinking, and He will protect us even when you the individual, do not necessarily feel like everything turned out how it should have turned out.

And then, too often, we push for our own ideas, not to see the church grow, but just because we want something. So we talk louder, act bigger, sound smarter so that we can push our ideas at the cost of the likely genuine feelings of others. But we are called to be pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Rather than demanding for our own ways, we are supposed to rest in this gift of the humiliation of Christ, His incarnation and His Passion, and there we can rest assured that we will follow suit in His exaltation—in His resurrection and glorification. Our bodies will be made perfect, we will have every need met, we will

be cared for and guided and know no more pain. But until then, we are not supposed to fight for our own needs or wants but serve others in order that they may know this true peace as well.

James puts forth what we ought to strive for, how we ought to serve one another and seek their needs first, but Jesus *shows* us this in our Gospel: we are to receive those around us, those who come to us and those we run across. We are to welcome them and listen to them (and hear them!) just as we welcome Ben into our midst today. We ought to find how we can truly serve them, but first we must hear what their needs are. This doesn't mean they get everything they ask for or automatically get their way, just like Jesus likely wouldn't have given the child in our reading a bottle of Jack Daniels had he asked for it, but He does welcome the child and genuinely hear and care for that child.

From welcoming both friends and strangers, peace will flow. Others will hear of the Gospel (and this can happen because the church isn't splintering from us demanding our own ways, which is in itself another peaceful result)

And when we struggle to live like this, Wisdom receives us time and time again. We who are too high and mighty to live wisely, are served by Him who was glorified, whom we ought to serve, and yet He deigns it right to receive us again, like the whiny, needy children we are, so that, just as the disciples and early church needed His constant care and reminders, we too might grow together to be a unified

Church. We, who are slow to learn, are taught this foreign concept of a humble wisdom, taught to use our intelligences and our gifts in order to serve others. We are taught this not in a lecture from Jesus but by His example of serving us—He feeds us with His own body and blood, He washes us—like He washed His disciples’ feet, He cleanses us in Holy Baptism—and He does not abandon us when that’s all we deserve, but He gets His hands dirty to continue to be with us in the messes we make, in the conflicts that are entirely our own faults, in the blood and tears that we unfortunately cause among brothers and sisters. We who too often care only our own earthly gain, are served by Him who in His loving wisdom, meets our needs and is with us, always.

Amen.