

1Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

3When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

#### Two Kinds of Wisdom

13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

“Three years, three weeks, three thousand dollars, and finally a three point sermon.” This very insightful and amusing comment about my doctor of ministry degree work was offered by a parishioner a few weeks ago after I finally preached a traditional three point sermon. Each week I meet with Jim Bendig to study the Bible passage on which I’ll be preaching that week and almost every week, he proposes three points about the passage that would make for a fine three point sermon. The thing of it is, though his ideas are good ones, I am not one who is prone to preach a three point sermon and since that great comment was made a few weeks ago, I’ve been wondering why. And the best I can figure is that I feel mighty fine when I’m able to write a sermon that makes a single point, let alone three of them. But in reviewing these past week’s sermons on the Book of James, I realize that this has been a kind of ongoing sermon—one point a week for three weeks equals a three point sermon.

The first sermon, or point, was about each of us having Christ like qualities. We don’t earn them or learn them—it’s simply how God made us. Created in the image of God with the breath of the divine giving life to each one of us. Grace, pure grace.

The second sermon was about James’ claim that faith without works is dead. His statement stands in contrast with the Apostle Paul, and later Martin Luther, who write that we are saved by grace and grace alone. And yet, in that sermon, I pointed out that we justify our existence on earth by doing the works of faith—I didn’t suggest we could justify ourselves eternally or gain our salvation through these deeds but rather, that without being doers of our faith, it can feel like our faith is dying.

And while we are created in the image of God, called to be Christ to others and while doing works of faith does keep our faith alive and makes us feel worthwhile—neither point, or sermon, tells the whole story. There is a third point, a most important point, a point that concludes this sermon series even as it launches us into our new vision process that begins next week.

Ruth Nyce was the doctor’s wife in the small town in which I grew up. One busy December day, she was at Southwyck Mall in Toledo, a full hour’s drive from home, doing some Christmas shopping. When she returned to her home from the mall she discovered that her purse was missing. As she walked into her home, the phone was ringing. When she picked up the receiver, an unknown woman introduced herself, explaining to Ruth that she had found a Ruth Nyce’s purse at the Southwyck Mall and would she happen to be Ruth Nyce. Needless to

say, Ruth was so very relieved that her purse had been found and not only that, the lady on the other end of the line promised to overnight it to her the next day. When the purse arrived at their home the next day, Ruth found everything in tact, none of her cash was gone, and there was even a very nice note from the lady who had found the purse. Ruth was so very grateful and to show her gratitude, Ruth sent the woman money for postage and a flower arrangement. And, to this day, twenty-five years later, Ruth still sends the woman a bouquet of flowers every year on the anniversary of the day she lost her purse. Ruth remembers the relief and gratitude she felt that cold winter day and although she'll never be able to repay the favor, she wants to do something to show gratitude.

Ruth didn't do anything to get the woman to return her purse. She couldn't have. The woman who returned her purse did it out of grace, pure grace. Nothing Ruth could have said or done would have gotten the woman to send the purse—or even contact Ruth in the first place—had the woman not wanted to be kind to Ruth and return her purse. Ruth's purse being returned to her had nothing to do with Ruth but had everything to do with the woman. And that's the way it is with God's grace. Our being created in the image of God, or being able to be Christ to one another, has nothing to do with us. It's all about who and what God is. Not who and what we are.

Ruth sent the woman payment for postage and continues to send her flowers every December not because she must, but because she may. There's nothing about that yearly bouquet that changes anything that happened that December day so long ago, but Ruth feels compelled to send the flowers anyway. Ruth wants to do something. Just like we want to do something.

And finally, this is the third point, the point of this sermon, why do we want to do something? Do we, in the end, do good works to justify ourselves—no, that's been done for us by the grace of God—but even though we know it doesn't change our relationship with God we still want to do things for God because we, like Ruth Nyce, are just so grateful. We look around and see all that God has done for us and what do we want to do in response? We want to thank God. Just like when a neighbor helps us out by giving us a jump when our battery is dead in the cold of winter so we bake them cookies to say thank you, we want to thank God for the great things God does for us. We want to praise God. We want to let God know how relieved we are at what God has done for us and as a means of showing our gratitude, we try to do for others what God has done for us. Not because we must, but because we may. Not because God makes us, but because we want to. Not because others need us, although that very well may be the case, but because we need to find a way to thank God.

The best way we can think of thanking and praising God is by doing what Jesus tells us to do and that is to love our lord our God with all our heart, and all our strength, and all our mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And that's the framework for our new vision process—Grounded in Gratitude. As people who recognize the many blessings in our lives—physical, spiritual, and mental—we envision being people who share those blessings with others out of our profound gratitude to God. Again, not because we must, but because we may. Thanks be to God that we may.