

Sermon for 19 September 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Scriptures: Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1; James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9 :30-37
« **Welcome !** »

After the 10 :30 service today, a group of us will gather to select the leaders of this church for the coming year..... a “select”group called the Nominating Committee.

I as pastor am chairperson.

How will the scriptures and prayers, the hymns and collection and sharing we’re doing right now influence our choices?

Take the Proverbs passage: “A Good Woman,” or “The Capable Wife.” Who’s like that in this congregation? Anybody here like that? “She seeks wool and flax/and works with willing hands..... She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.”

Or Psalm 1: “Happy are those/who do not follow the advice of the wicked...They are like trees/planted by streams of water,/ which yield their fruit in its season,/ and their leaves do not wither.”

What are we looking for?

Who’s welcome here?

Somebody put it well last week: “The trouble is, it’s the same old people doing everything every year.”

And as your pastor, I can echo, “...and you’re tired.”

That’s what I’m dealing with this year, and as the person that never fails to point out a problem when I see it, I’m confronting God with what I see, and saying loud and clear, where you all can hear it, “Lord, what are we supposed to do?”

Let me read a little further. Here’s James: “Who is wise and understanding among you?...You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly...”
O boy, I should know not to get comfort from old James: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” Tough love, for sure.

I’m at a loss. We’re barely alive. We manage ... but do something, Lord!

“Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”

Let us pray.

Lord, I want to inspire. Every week I go to meetings and read books full of examples of people no bigger or better than Bethesda. Every time I fall, you pick me up. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed at the beauty of what gets done here in your name, and the love that lifts us up and turns us around ... Could you please do just a little more miracle-working and encourage us to make inspired choices this year? Knock us over with self-confidence ... not ours, but yours in us. Get us in trouble ... I mean just enough to pray a better way and get the real thing in our attitude? God, please make us cry with your love of us, so we're not slow at seeing what we can do, both together and by ourselves.... We're starting over. Help somebody agree to try a new task, and somebody old and tired agree to walk beside and explain, and listen, and be so grateful not to be an officer again that they get excited with helping the new person take over. Like a little child, Lord. One you held in your arms and made an example to those disciples who, Lord help us, argued among themselves about who was the greatest among them.

Work wonders with us, Jesus. You do that so well. We need so much to see that here ... in the gentle ways we work with each other and welcome one another every week, and in the precious things we accomplish in our childlike trust and hope and ... our walk with you.

Let that welcome show, again and again, inside and outside Bethesda Church.

Amen.