

Sermon for 15 September 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalter: 750 (Psalm 19, *Response 1*); James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

## Sermon

Long before Jesus, the Bible describes Wisdom as a woman. It's a powerful sign that calls us to honor the feminine aspect of God, just as a messiah honors the masculine side of divinity.

Honor that call. Promise to grow in this era of expanding feminine equality in the church, in politics, in a great deal of the world's population. Read over today's vivid portrayal of strong character. Think of what it means, for example, to be told that being less than our best human selves ruins us and whatever we touch ... Let Big Mama buy the house in the white neighborhood, and then watch grace operate in hard times, as we were blessed with strongly feminine loving care in our early development. I've always said one of my earliest memories was of watching the cars go by as I rested in my mother's lap after some kind of tussle with her authority I can't recall. Let scripture push you into equality, whatever your pronoun!

Then allow today to be awesome with Psalm 19's glorious imagery. Remember that we come from ancestors who neither read nor wrote ... fie on websites and text messages! Take off your earplugs and shout, and sniff, and twirl, for the Lord's sake! "There is no voice, but the voice is heard!" We are so much more than scientists! More than rational beings! Don't depend on church to help you celebrate nature ... We do good things here to praise and dream, to touch and twirl and sing, but there are a thousand more calls and touches to bring alive what we really are: Nature personified, as any tiny human shows us from the first moment of being in our arms, looking into our eyes, or turning toward something more important than us! Thank God for psalms, for sure!

And then James. Have you enjoyed him this week? Have you let him get to you? Are you telling it like it is, wise guy, smart sister? What does today's patch of reality-talk bring alive for you? Have you spent twenty minutes this week allowing God to challenge your schedule, or honor your beginning of a dream---or come close enough to hear your inner sob? This is Spirit up close and touchable. God is walking into your room and listening, and then talking back. Try him on, if you are serious about prayer. Let the vacancies and the wanderings you catch in yourself during serious prayer be admitted. Faith is being and doing, as well as thinking and believing. Thank God for Big Brother ... or little sister ...or however you find grace coming home into your very private space. Love James. He'll surprise you how he loves back!

Then the commentator tells us Mark has pushed facts and details around to suit the story he's ready to lift up about Jesus today. At some point, this absorbing guy with a long train of followers and just too many examples of human pain and trouble, gets between two narrow sides of a pathway and starts talking elemental wild stuff. "He said all this quite openly;" and Peter took him aside ..... and he said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

And then from somewhere else, some trip or speech --- comes this harsh string of "If you don't"'s that makes James look like a schoolboy, and Lady Wisdom the only truth-talker on the page. You have serious purpose to be about. You aren't here for excuses. You are going to be real ... or just plain foolish.

How many times have we found this out, sweet and sour alike, dark and light, heart-breaking and awesomely healing?

This is serious. Get to work. I love you. You know how to love.

Do so!

Amen.