

[Proverbs 31:10-31](#)

[Psalm 1](#)

[James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a](#)

[Mark 9:30-37](#)

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.”

There is an esoteric core to this teaching. While I really want to get to the reading from Mark, I’m pretty sure that at least half of you won’t really hear anything I have to say about it until I say something about the “Capable Wife” reading from Proverbs. The first thing I’d like to say, I’m not fond of anyone telling me how I need to act to be perfect. Certainly in my past, it was my nature to react by doing the exact opposite. Put me in a box and I’m going to try to get out of it. That being said, the woman described in this text is *awesome*, because this woman is a better man than I am. She is organized, self-directed,

she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hand to the needy, she is disciplined, and productive. I'd have to point out that this is not a description of a servant.

This is the description of a CEO. In fact, if you happen to know any women like this -- and in this congregation, we all do (because there are lots of you) -- you know that women of this description are not meek, mild, and submissive -- and woe to the one who thinks otherwise!

Three thousand years later, we live in a different culture. We think of sex roles differently and we should, because our faith has caused us to grow and think differently through the ages. Still, I find it remarkable that this iron age description of "ideal womanhood" supposes that women are competent and capable. This is extremely forward-thinking for the iron age and undoubtedly helped plant the seeds for changes to come in future ages. I'm not a big fan of cancel culture which wants to condemn our forebears for their shortcomings; like it or not, we stand on their shoulders. And, honestly, box or not, when

I read over this list, it's a decent description of the person I want to be when I grow up.

Our reading from James also has something to say about living spiritually as a woman or a man in the world. James boils down how we should behave in the world in these words: "Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom." That is a tall order.

James also gives us a way of discerning whether the wisdom that informs our actions, individually and collectively, is actually "from above": The wisdom from above, he says, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy."

Paul calls this the Christ in us. James refers to it as the indwelling Wisdom from above. Don't you wish that this is the kind of person people immediately thought of when they heard the word, Christian? "Peaceable, gentle, willing

to yield ...”. Sadly I hear a lot of Christians bent, not on saving the world, but on condemning it. It makes me think they’ve never experienced the “wisdom from above .. full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality ... or hypocrisy.” We’ve got some work to do to restore the good name of Christianity as a spiritual force for good in the world.

At the heart of this “wisdom from above” is the same kind of selflessness we see in Jesus, putting our habitual and selfish reactions aside and letting the “wisdom from above” guide our actions and responses. In living our daily lives, it really does come down to asking, “What would Jesus do?” But take it just a step further: “What should I do, as his disciple, and knowing that Jesus loves this person, or these people? Or, those people?”

Why should we bother to care about others at all?

In the reading from Mark this morning we find Jesus trying to explain some of the big questions of life to his disciples. He begins by trying to explain the whole “death and resurrection” thing to them. The gospel tells us that the disciples, no doubt trying to figure out how a “just and powerful God” could allow such unjust suffering as Jesus said was coming, just didn’t get it and outright refused to consider it. Jesus explains that true leadership means true selflessness - giving one’s self for others, even giving it up for the least important people in the world’s eyes.

And to make the point, he takes a child in his arms and says, “You should treat even this little child as a manifestation of all that is Holy because that same Holiness that is in me is, in fact, there in him. You care for him, you care for me. You welcome me into your heart, you welcome the Father into your heart”. Here’s that esoteric part - that spiritual teaching I was talking about.

A central teaching of Christianity is that every human being is born bearing the image and likeness of God. It may be deeply buried; but it's there. That "image of God" is the Christ which we promise to seek and promise to serve in all human beings in our baptismal vows. That image of God, or Christ, is also our own truest, most inner self. Paul refers to the discovery of this truth - and I quote - as "the moment the Father revealed his Son in me." [... not "to me," but "in me."] Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we pray that the end result of our outward, visible act of communion will be the inner grace that Christ will live in us, and we in him.

Jesus teaches that we should welcome everyone as we would the child in Jesus' arms, as one bearing the divine light within them; because whether they know it or not, they do. We care for others because, in doing so, we show our love to God whose image they bear. We should seek that light in others, at every opportunity call it forth, and serve one another with gentleness born - never of

timidity, but - of wisdom, and as Jesus said elsewhere, being “as wise as serpents ... but as gentle as doves.”