

BICYCLING WITH JESUS

James 3

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Pastor Jenny Moran

Let us pray.

How many of us here today have been faced with two paths to take in life, two choices that we instinctively knew would lead to very different outcomes? Think about those times in your life for a moment and then consider: was it difficult to make your decision, whatever that happened to be? What did you base it on? Are you glad you chose the path you did? I think back to when Paul and I were married and living in VA. I was working and God presented me with this wonderful opportunity to go to seminary. It was a struggle to make the decision to quit my job since Paul was still a graduate student himself. The world certainly said I was foolish to stop working and bringing in the bulk of our income. But *God* said that going to seminary was the right thing to do. I made that decision to go to seminary and it was hard, but it has also been a path filled with good fruit, a path that did not include envy or ambition by any stretch of the imagination.

Well, our Scripture reading from James this morning talks about these two kinds of paths. One path is paved with earthly wisdom, a wisdom that James calls “unspiritual and devilish.” In his words, this path has envy and selfishness, disorder and wickedness. It is the path that says, “don’t plunge into a life of financial insecurity for seminary!” But then the other path is one of wisdom from above. It is pure, peaceable, gentle, filled with mercy and good fruit, it is not hypocritical, and it is willing to yield. Notice, James doesn’t say it is an easy path, but he does say that it is a righteous path, and it is a path that Jesus has paved for us and still leads us on today.

As I read James' description of the Christian path I tried to think of ways to picture it. What are some images that we can work with to help us frame our understanding of that path, to dig deeper into our understanding of our Christian actions? Well, God brought to mind the bike trip our church took back in July down in Cannon Fall. And, indeed, that bike trip does provide a nice concrete image of this relationship with Jesus that James is talking about, which is what following the Christian path is really about. I learned a lot of things about biking on that trip, like when and why and how you change your gears, but I also learned a bit about tandem biking. Jim and Cathy Holtmeier do a lot of tandem biking and as I watched them, I realized tandem biking is a wonderful analogy for our walk with Jesus.

The first thing that struck me about riding tandem is that if you are on the back of the bike, you have to have complete trust in the person on the front of the bike. The person in front steers, changes gears, sets the pedaling rhythm, and is in control of the brakes. The person in the back pretty much sits there and pedals. They do a few other things, too, which we'll get to, but for now consider this wonderful image. If we truly trust Jesus to guide us on the Christian path, the path of righteousness and wisdom that James talks about, it's like we are on the back of the bike being led by him, trusting him to steer us where we need to go and joining him eagerly in the work of moving forward on that path.

Now I am not trying to paint too rosy and unrealistic a picture of what following Jesus is like. It isn't easy. And neither is riding a tandem bike because, in both cases, it is hard for us to trust another. I can add a little personal experience since Cathy and Jim loaned us a tandem to try out ourselves. I am the one who rides on the back of the bike

and I have realized very quickly that it isn't easy to be this trusting. Cathy and Jim had mentioned to us that not every couple can adjust to tandem bike riding, but I didn't fully understand what they meant until one ride when I was happily pedaling along behind Paul, then was literally jerked out of my enjoyment of the ride. Paul had stopped pedaling but I was still trying to pedal and instead of continuing on merrily, my knee just got jerked painfully to the side. "What was the deal?" I wondered...I might have even said something like that, too. ☹ Well, the deal was that Paul had seen a stop sign and a car up ahead that I hadn't seen. Had we kept going like I wanted to, we could have been hurt quite badly. Well, in the same way, Jesus sees things that we don't, he knows when we need to stop and when we need to turn, when we need to go faster and when we need to slow down. We can't predict that and so we have to yield our will completely to his. And that is hard to do. But this yielding of the will is exactly what James is talking about in verse 17 where he says, "the wisdom from above is willing to yield." Pretty straightforward, isn't it? To follow Jesus we need to make our will his will so that we can stay safely on the path of righteousness.

Now the good news is that once we manage this hard work of yielding to the person on the front of our bike, Jesus, our trip on this path begins to take a really glorious turn. On a tandem bike, the person in the back has an easier time of it than the person in the front. Likewise, Jesus has done the hard work of paving this path of righteousness for us, hasn't he? He is the one who has gone to the cross, died so we might be forgiven, and then has returned to guide us on this trail he has blazed. He has made the path of righteousness possible for us to travel on and has made it possible for us to turn away from the path of earthly wisdom. Jesus does the hardest work for us.

One of the best things about being in the back is that you can go so much farther and faster, and pull much heavier loads than you could alone. Paul and I discovered this when we hooked the kids' Burley trailer up to the back of the tandem bike. Paul had spent the whole summer hauling them alone and, although he is much stronger than I am, he was always struggling to keep up with me on the hills. But when we got on that tandem bike, neither of us hardly noticed that we were pulling anything. I am willing to bet that other people noticed the tandem bike hauling a double wide trailer, though! We must have taken up 10 feet of sidewalk and probably looked strange at best. But there again, isn't that what it is like when we follow Jesus? Those heavy burdens are still there, but they are much easier to carry and people notice the difference when we share the burden with Jesus.

Another wonderful thing about bicycling with Jesus is that we get to see more of the beauty on the way. Because we trust in him to guide us, to steer us safely, we can look around and appreciate what he has created on the path. Once when Jim and Cathy passed me on the bike trip to Cannon Falls, I noticed Cathy was able to look around as they traveled. She commented on some birds and the river and in general about how beautiful the day was. I, of course, missed most of this because I was concentrating hard on not running into one of the other many bikers and trying to figure out the whole gear thing, and it was all generally a blur. Cathy had Jim doing all of that navigating and that meant Cathy could enjoy the trip. Likewise, Jesus does that for us. We can enjoy the beauty God has created in the world because Jesus makes the trip a bit easier for us. We still have to struggle and work, just like the person on the back of the tandem bike still

had to keep pedaling, but that work is made much more bearable and beautiful because of Jesus' presence.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we won't be exhausted as we follow Jesus, because sometimes Jesus asks exhausting things of us. In Matthew 5:14 Jesus says, "You are the light of the world!" not "You are the tiny light that shines 10 feet around your home." No, you are the light of the WORLD! You bet that is an exhausting call! Never mind the other things we deal with in daily life that drain our energy. Some of us are dealing with things that are more than exhausting. Frankly, the Fall Festival this weekend fits into that category! And some of us are worn out from dealing with long term stressful situations like overwhelming work conditions brought about by the poor economy. Some of us are dealing with the fear of *no* work because of the economic downturn. Others of us are facing major health issues which are exhausting physically and emotionally.

On a personal level, I think about the weeks and months ahead where I will be going to Pennsylvania one week a month and taking classes via web cam in between in order to satisfy the Moravian church's requirement that I live in Bethlehem, PA before I can be ordained. Then when I imagine doing that while also serving God here at CCC and at home, I feel exhausted before I have begun. Add being the light of the world on top of that, and I have to say that my human side says, "Right, *that's* pretty hard to picture." But Jesus is calling us to be the light of the world, to follow his call, even when we are worn out. And when that seems rather overwhelming, and pretty hard to picture, bring to mind the image of the tandem bike, because as Jesus calls us to this path he also guides us along it, helps us pedal, and is simply present with us. We will never have to

do the work of our journey alone because Jesus will never leave us on it. For when we yield our will to his, Jesus is the one pedaling and steering, he is the one carrying the greater weight of the burden.

As we head home today, hopefully to rest after what was certainly an exhausting weekend, I hope you hold this image close to in your minds. I am not going to wrap the sermon up by summarizing the main points, or by sharing a one sentence kernel of wisdom. Instead, I would encourage all of us to continue this sermon in our own minds. Take the time to study Scripture and consider what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to be the light of the world. For we are all called by Jesus in the tumult of our lives to follow him on the path of true wisdom. May we answer him and share his light with the world. Let us pray.