

Pentecost 17 (Proper 20)  
September 23, 2012  
Text: James 3:13—4:10  
Theme: "Surrender to God"

**One of the greatest gifts God has ever given me is Bishop Pittelko, not because he covers for me when I need to be gone, although that is nice, and not because he represents everything right about the Church, although he does, but because he is able to help me find center. Like all human beings, I can get all caught up in my own plans and goals for life. I can become completely distracted by Church politics and individual personalities. I can be blinded by my plans and visions of where this congregation should be but Bishop Pittelko has a wonderful way of helping me to find center.**

**Recently he and I were discussing a direction in which God seemed to be pushing me but it was not according to my plan. I had all the good reasons why this would not work and how God surely must agree that this was not a good idea. I had statistics and well crafted arguments to support my findings. After I had made my argument, he cracked that wry smile of his and said, "okay, I understand your point and your plan sounds well thought out, but you know, in the end, he's going to win."**

**It is a difficult thing to surrender to God. We like to keep him at a distance because he makes demands that are difficult for us and drives us in new directions with which we are unfamiliar. Yet, no matter how hard we try to keep him at arm's length, he pushes his way into our lives and**

**demands no other terms but full surrender. Look at the picture on the front of the bulletin this morning. That is a picture of full surrender. It is a lamb prepared for slaughter. Only when we see ourselves like that lamb do we begin to understand the Christian life.**

**We had no hope. We had sinned and therefore we were damned. We were tied up and prepared for slaughter. It was at that moment that Jesus stepped in, cut us loose and took our place. Look at that lamb and listen again to our epistle from James.**

**“Who is wise and understanding among you?” The disciples learned from Jesus that the wise are the humble who understand that the first must be the servant of all.**

**“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” When we fail to surrender to God, we bind ourselves again. Christ sets us free but when we take the reins and try to run life our way, we shackle ourselves to Satan, the prince of this world.**

**“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

**“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.... Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you....Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”**

**It is when we humble ourselves before God that we comprehend full and complete peace. When we openly and fully admit that he is going to win, we can relax. Our human passions war within us but surrender to God brings us peace. It does not matter who is first and who is last. It does not matter who has what compared to what we have. It does not matter who is smarter or better looking. It only matters that God has led us into the exactly right place at the exact right time with exactly what we need to do the job he has prepared for us to do.**

**Resist the devil. He is the one who works to convince you that it's all on you; that you have to figure out the path and make the right choices or else you will be punished. God tells us that the end of the journey has already been established and will not be changed. So the whole point of**

**life is learning and growing through the journey. It took me a long time to believe this. Do any of you know what my GPA was in High School? Do you know what I scored on the ACT? Do you know what my class ranking was in college? Are you aware of the financial investments I have made? NO! And you don't care. Yet those are things I agonized over in my youth. Yet, they don't matter because here I am doing exactly what God intended for me to do with all the resources I need to do the job. It was the devil who encouraged me to waste time worrying about my GPA instead of focusing on learning and growing through the journey.**

**The only wrong choice is a choice not to grow in Christ. Whatever you are doing, if you are growing in your relationship with Christ, you are doing fine. Humble yourself before God. He's going to win anyway. Embrace the truth that Jesus Christ took our place at the slaughter and set us free. Don't hand Satan a length of rope and let him bind you up again, and certainly don't bind yourself with worry and fear.**