

First Reading

Jeremiah 11:18-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁸ It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds.

¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!"

²⁰ But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Epistle

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

⁴ Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Gospel

Mark 9:30-37 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Sermon under the trees:

"Everyone remain standing. I will give you some instructions and the reward for following instructions is the choice of a treat from this bag. Now, freeze in place until I say GO! I want you to line up along the edge of the rug. Wait until I say GO! The first person in the line will get two choices from the bag. The rest will have one choice. I hope that I have enough for everyone. Ready, set, GO!" [*Children will rush to line up, maybe budge in front to be first.*] "Great job. Are you all in place? OK, stay there." [*Walk to other end of line.*] "Name gets first choice of two items. What, you thought that the first person was on the other end of the line? Did I say which was the first end and which was the last end? Let's sit down and try to work this all out.

"Jesus was walking to Capernaum with his disciples and he overheard them arguing between themselves. That evening, he asked the disciples what they discussed and learned that they argued about who among them was the greatest, the best disciple. Jesus rolled his eyes and shook his head, as I imagine he often does when we just don't get it. He told them that whoever wants to be the first, must be last and must be a servant to all.

"That seems very unfair, particularly when you are lining up for a treat. But, how did the first person get to that spot in the line? Did anyone push? take a head start? How did the last person get to that position? Did s/he step aside for others to go ahead because s/he was being kind or because s/he couldn't compete with those rushing to the front? Sometimes, what seems unfair on the surface can be God's way of showing justice to those without selfish-ambition. Let's pray,

"God you give out perfect justice. . . . Remind me to step aside sometimes . . . for the sake of others. In Jesus Christ, Amen."