Weekly Bible Study group – May 20, 2009

This week’s text: **James 3:13-18**
Reflection by Bob Zurinsky, SPU Center for Worship

This is a really important passage. It’s all about the motivations that lay underneath our actions. James says that people are either filled with “earthly” wisdom, or they’re filled with “heavenly” wisdom. What’s the difference between these? Pretty simple – you’re living with fake wisdom if your actions are driven by “envy and selfish ambition.” But you’re living with true wisdom if your actions are driven by love. This looks like: **humility, gentleness, purity, mercy, willingness to yield to others, and peace-making.** Those things are the definition of true wisdom according to James.

Most of us will say that we desire to be wise. I know that I do. I want the wisdom that comes from heaven. I don’t want to be satisfied with a life driven by fear. I want a life fueled by love. But how do we get there? I’m absolutely fascinated with what James says about this in verse 14. He says that if you’re seeking to have true wisdom, the first step is to **STOP PRETENDING.**

**“But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.”**

The first step toward wholeness is to get real. Take off your mask. Stop pretending that you’re good or happy or peaceful or loving or pure or merciful. Don’t give the impression that something is there inside you when you know it really isn’t. Stop lying. The lying is killing you. It’s killing your soul, it’s destroying your relationships with others. And obviously God knows who you really are anyway – are you trying to lie to him too?

I don’t know if you’re like me at all, but I always know when someone is faking it. When I’m interacting with someone and they’re wearing a mask, I know it. I can feel it in my gut. People pretending that they have the right answers. People pretending that they’re wise or holy or full of love. When you encounter a person who is wearing a mask, you know it. Isn’t that true? Don’t you just get an icky feeling in your stomach?

On the other hand, I am so happy to say that I have people in my life (many on group staff!) who are striving to tear off the masks. People living with brutal honesty. People who are willing to appear broken and weak in front of others, because they’ve decided that lying just won’t work. These are the people I want to be around. These are the people who speak wisdom into my life and give hope to the world around them.

On the path to true wisdom, listen to the teaching of James: do not be boastful and false to the truth of what’s inside you. Live with honesty before God and others. Stop hiding. Even if what’s inside seems too shameful to speak out loud, deep down we all know that this is the only path to life. **GET REAL.**