

**James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a:**

*Wise followers of Christ should live a humble life. Jealousy and selfish ambition are not wise, but cause evil, conflict, murder and struggle. Therefore God's people should resist evil, submit to God, draw near to God, and seek to be cleansed.*

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. 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. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? 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. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you.

**Mark 9:30-37:** *Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, and then challenges the disciples for arguing about which of them is greatest. Then he teaches them that the greatest in God's Reign must be the slave of all, and that whoever welcomes a child, welcomes Jesus, and the One who sent him.*

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 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." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 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."

**COCU57B**

The Lectionary readings offer us a choice between our own selfish desires, ambitions and power, and serving, loving and sharing with others as we follow the way of Jesus. It is a tough choice to give up personal power and self-interest in favour of the common good, but this is the way of Christ - the way of peace, service, grace and love. The readings applaud the life of the righteous person: the righteous wife in Proverbs 31 (clearly written in a time of patriarchy, and now applicable to both men and women, rather than just the women!), the righteous person who studies God's law in Psalm 1, James' call to live a humble life submitted to God, Jesus' teaching that the greatest in God's Reign must be servants - the Scriptures call us to humility, service, righteousness, and generosity.

Peacemaking, conflict resolution, poverty alleviation and ecological justice in our world are not just about addressing specific situations and causes, but are about changing the entire way we live on the planet, which means working to dismantle all systems that do any kind of violence to others - religious systems that oppress and exclude people of different beliefs and practices; economic systems that unfairly favour large corporations and countries over smaller, less developed ones with trade restrictions, biased tariffs and subsidies; and global power structures that prioritize the interests of wealthy and powerful nations over smaller and weaker ones. The essential shift is toward kindness, grace and love.

The Scriptures make it clear that selfishness, expediency, domination, jealousy and hoarding are all part of what it calls wickedness, while humility, kindness, grace and generosity are righteousness. Living according to the ways of "wickedness" increases suffering and conflict in the world, while living according to the ways of righteousness brings peace, joy, healing and connectedness. The reality of our world, though, is that most of us live between these two extremes, and as we seek to embrace righteousness more and more, so we find ourselves at odds with any systems and people that are corrupt, selfish and violent. The result is that, like Jesus, Jeremiah and others who have stood for the values of God's Reign, we may well find ourselves being persecuted. But, this is the price we pay for dreaming of a better world and committing to bring it about. And, as more of us embrace the ways of righteousness, so the momentum grows, until finally, one day, the dream becomes reality. (Source: John van de Laar)

**Psalm 1:** *Righteous people are blessed because they do not follow the ways of the wicked, but love God's instruction. They are like trees planted by streams, bearing fruit and always succeeding. The wicked, however, are destroyed.*

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
**but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on God's law they meditate day and night.**  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
**which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.**  
In all that they do, they prosper.  
The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
**for God watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

### **Proverbs 31:10-31: 'A woman of courage'**

*A good wife is to be valued because she cares for her family and her servants, she provides for her household, she brings honour to her husband. This woman is an industrious resourceful household manager. She produces and sells textiles, brings in income for the family, oversees the planting of vineyards and uses her own money to set them up. She has servants she oversees, she gives to the poor, her household is a small business that provides for her family, and her husband is praised for it. She works both inside and outside of her home. (Source: John van de Laar)*  
*Proverbs 1 introduced Dame Wisdom, who was with God when the heavens and earth were created. She was the master designer and architect of creation. She watched God bring order out of chaos. She rejoiced in creation, and calls out in the public square and city gates for men and women to follow her. She wants us to learn her ways, so that she can give us good lives. She builds a house, prepares a feast, then goes out again to call everyone to come into her house, eat her feast, and learn her ways. She continues to create and bring order to the world. The last time we hear of Dame Wisdom is in Proverbs 9. And the last thing we hear about in Proverbs is the Wise Woman in the Ch 31 who shows us Dame Wisdom in action. This woman does everything Wisdom does in earlier chapters: she creates, brings order to chaos, feeds and clothes her family, and takes care of the poor. She doesn't just live wisely, she is Wisdom Incarnate. These verses do not describe what the typical woman of that day is like. They are showing us Wisdom hard at work in the everyday world.*  
*And as for the husband? The poem indicates that "the elders of the land" "sat" at the gates (Prov 31:23, 31). This undoubtedly suggests that they must have been doing something quite worthwhile for the benefit of society. The city gate in Israel*

*was the locale of commercial and legal transactions (cf. Deut 22:15; Ruth 4:1, 10-11) where the leaders of the city met to hold court sessions to ensure that justice is given to the oppressed and to repudiate the wicked; to redirect the erring members of the community; and to determine the direction of national life (Prov 1:21; 31:23; cf. Ruth 4:11; Job 29:7). As such, ". . . [t]he city gate held an important social and administrative role in the culture of ancient cities." Significantly, city gates in Israel were extremely important in the life of the people for social, administrative and business contact. Here, kings as well as city elders sat to administer justice (cf. Deut 21:19; Josh 20:4). The process of the administration of justice was frequently referred to as "at the gate" thus, the afflicted was not to be "crushed at the gate" (cf. Prov 22:22). (Source: Joel Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul, Jos Ecwa Theological Seminary, Jos, Nigeria)*

A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.  
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.  
She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.  
She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.  
She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.  
She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant-girls.  
She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong.  
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.  
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all". Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.