

**WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, January 31, 2023**  
**Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN**

**“I GET IN THE WAY”**

**READING:** James 4:1-4 – What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Let me read you something I came across a couple of weeks ago. It was written by one Flannery O'Connor in his book, "A Prayer Journal". It goes like this:

"Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon. The crescent is very beautiful and perhaps that is all one like I am should or could see; but what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know You God because I am in the way. Please help me to put myself aside."

My, oh my! Did he hit the nail on the head, don't you think? What a marvelous way to picture one of our most necessary truths: "My sin blinds me to God and his ways." I can say with real truth that I get in the way of God, his Word, his grace, his Kingdom. If I could just stay out of the way! But that Old Adam is strong in me. Every day he wants to be in charge and call the shots. And when I let him have his head, he'll always move my "self shadow" so it covers more and more of God and his beauty.

St. James says much the same thing in our reading. He says, "You want something but don't get it." That irritates our sinful self, especially if this is something ungodly and proscribed. We let greed, lust, jealousy, apathy, judgementalism, and so forth cause an eclipse of "the Moon". God is hidden from us, and so is his wisdom and his will. The deeper we let ourselves sink into those sins, the less and less of Him we see. Then we make up our own rules. We decide what is good and what is not. And, without Him shining his light on us, we go right ahead and declare ourselves to be "good little boys and girls." We judge ourselves by "the shadow that is nothing."

St. James says rightly that the friendlier we get with the sinful things of this world the more grows our hatred of God. But here's the good news – the flipside of the lesson: the less we see the things of this world as our friends, the more will grow our love for the Lord. The better we become at walking in his ways and living by his Son, Jesus Christ, the more we appreciate what God has done for us in him. The more we read, learn, and inwardly digest his Word, the brighter God shines on us and in us. The crescent moon can become a waxing moon, one that gets bigger and fuller and all the more beautiful.

Ending his prayer, O'Connor asks God to "help me put myself aside." That's the ticket! That's the essence of living the Christian life: put myself aside so that Jesus can shine in me. That means I have to constantly and consistently work to discern God's will. I want to live as a loving, serving, praying, worshipping, giving, caring child of God. And that will only happen if I make diligent use of God's gifts: his Word, his Sacraments, and the children of God around me – my church family.

As O'Connor says in the prayer, "...perhaps that is all one like I am should or could see..." We will not see God in his full glory, his full beauty until we stand cleansed and washed in the blood of the Lamb, clothed in

white robes of his righteousness, and welcomed to stand before the throne. There we will “see him as he really is” and shout and sing his praises. Until then, we see just that beautiful crescent of “the Moon”, but that’s enough if we don’t let our sinful selves get in the way.

**PRAYER:**

**ANNOUNCEMENT(S):**

1. And announcing the return of the CHILI COOK-OFF AND DESSERT AUCTION, this Sunday, February 5 from 5-8 P.M. You can cook and enter a chili or two at *luthyouth.com*. You can bake one of you favorite cakes, pies, or cookies for the youth to auction off. Or you can just come and taste a variety of chilis and buy yourself a scrumptious dessert. This is one of our most entertaining events. Come and enjoy.
2. If you are a person “of a certain age”, let me invite you to our SENIORS MARDI GRAS PARTY on Thursday, February 9, noonish, in the Fireside Room. Bring a dish to pass. The main course will be pulled pork BBQ. Everything else, including a “King Cake” will be provided. Some games, some amusements, and some prizes will be in the offing. Call Karen and tell her to put your name on the sign up list and join us.  
“Laissez le Bontemps tulle!”