

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: James 5:13-20
Date preached: September 30, 2012

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Over the course of the past few weeks, we heard readings from the Epistle of James. James is a person of deep faith. It is that depth of faith in Christ Jesus that leads him to action. That same vision, one given to him by God, is shared throughout the whole church with direct impact for how she, the church, shall live her life.

In the verses we heard read, James identifies four specific aspects where we as the church are called upon to pray. He bids us to call upon the Lord, knowing that the Lord will hear our prayers.

Let me start with James' question, is anyone among you sick? When we hear someone is sick, we respond by placing their name on the prayer chain and writing it on the prayer pages. We respond with cards and notes of encouragement.

Now there is an important distinction that James uplifts. It is the elders of the church who are called upon to lead the congregation in prayer. "And the prayer of faith will

save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” That is the promise we have as we pray.

That is the vision of the church given to James. The elders of the church are the leaders in discipleship. One of the chief characteristics of discipleship is prayer.

“Is anyone cheerful?” asks James. “Let him sing praise.” This too is a form of prayer, as we give thanks and praise to God for the goodness we are experiencing. Such cheerfulness arises from answered prayer. There is joy in being made well.

James also asks, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.” Many of us may see suffering as a stumbling block to faith. Some of our suffering seems to have no end. In many instances we fail to see any value whatsoever in our suffering. Can anything good come out of suffering?

There are individuals who see suffering as God abandoning us. Some see suffering as God’s failure to love us. Perhaps that is easier than the reality that it is our actions or inactions that result in our suffering.

We deny the reality that our suffering is often tied to sin. Families suffer greatly when a spouse has been unfaithful in marriage. Individuals, Churches and businesses suffer when people speak ill of them.

Now, it is also a reality that there are times when we can see no reason for why we are suffering. That is the hardest because to endure. There is no one to blame. There is no one to accuse. We feel even more helpless because there are some sufferings that lack understanding. Suffering is a reality of our brokenness.

So it is that James states, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

In prayer, we speak and listen to God. In that dialog, we know that He is listening. It is in the prayerful dialog with God that we seek the things God desires. God's Kingdom will come. God's will is going to be done.

It was the will of God to do something about our sin that leads to sickness, suffering, broken relationships and a host of other evils. He sent his Son into the world. What is also a reality is that God knows suffering.

He sent his only Son and in so doing learned what it is to suffer. Christ endured suffering. Christ endured unjust things said about him. He spoke the truth when it was unpopular and it ruffled the feathers of the religious elitists.

Most importantly, Jesus suffered our just punishment for our sins. Christ suffered death on the cross. As God promised and as Jesus boldly prophesied, he was raised from death on the third day. On that day, our relationship with God was restored. Forgiveness rained down upon us as tears of joyful astonishment.

We too may be bold in our prayers for it is God's good desire to hear and answer them. Through the resurrection of our Lord there is healing for the sick, for those who suffer, for those whose friendships are torn asunder. "The prayer of the righteous person has great power as it is working."

Prayer works because God wants it to work. God bids us to pray so that we are drawn into his good desire and will for us. It is a will that bids us to look beyond the moment, seek healing that comes from his grace and move forward in mission.

Lest we think it is our work, remember that prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit opens our ears to hear the word. The Spirit opens our hearts to receive the Word. The Spirit leads us out to speak God's Word which calls for reconciliation, grace, mercy and love.

This work of God leads us to lives of cheerful thanksgiving. And to that end, let us always give thanks and praise to God, from whom come all good things!
AMEN.