

“HEALING PRAYER: The Gift of Healing---Part 2”

A sermon by
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Sunday, August 4, 2019

TEXTS: Mark 6:13 and 16:14-18 and James 5:13-18

Mark 6:13

They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Mark 16:14-18

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.’

James 5:13-18

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

The first congregation I served was as the Assistant Pastor and then the Associate Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Cumberland, Maryland. It was a great congregation filled with loving and caring Christians who had great patience with a young freshly minted pastor who had great enthusiasm and much to learn. One of first things I noticed was the beautiful parlor right off the parking lot entrance. In that parlor was a display case. In that display case was a rather unusual looking crown and the picture of a building with strange writing on the outside of it.

I asked one of the elders about these items. He proudly told me that the crown was a replica of one of the Korean Crowns of Silla. The replica had been given to the pastor and several elders of First Church, Cumberland in 1975 during their visit to Kyungju, South Korea. The occasion was the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Cumberland Presbyterian Hospital and Clinic in Gyeongju through a gift of \$40,000.00 from the Cumberland church.

The picture in the cabinet was a photograph of the hospital.

In today’s dollars, the congregation’s gift would amount to about \$350,000.00. Wow! The amazing thing to me was not the gift. Cumberland Presbyterian is a Christian hospital. Their mission is to treat the whole person. So, prior to anesthesia, the whole surgical team lays hands on the patient. Prayer is offered in Jesus’ name. The surgery begins.

Post-surgery, it is not just the chaplain who prays with the patient. Doctors, in the course of their rounds, regularly pray with and for their patients.

In an article entitled, “The Christian Church and the Ministry of Healing,” author David Atkinson writes, “Ministry to the diseased, the ill and the sick, has been part of Christian ministry from the very start of the Christian Church. In the post-Pentecost Church, the apostles did many signs and wonders among the people (the ‘signs of a true apostle’, 2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom. 15:19), and the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits were healed (cf. Acts 2:43; 3:6-8; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12; 19:11; 28:9).

Christians are said to minister to Christ himself by 'visiting those who are ill' (Matt. 25:39). Christians prayed for one another 'that you may be in health' (3 Jn. 2). There were recognizable [sic] 'gifts of healings' in the early church (1 Cor. 12:9), and the practice of anointing with oil and prayer for ill people who called for the elders is referred to in James 5:13ff."

The Scripture reading from James read this morning, concludes our examination of healing prayer. Since this is a communion Sunday, I want to highlight three simple truths.

First, is the importance of prayer.

Second, is the importance of community.

Third, is the importance of forgiveness.

We are like the early church in every way but one. The challenges facing individuals and families in the church have not changed, except in degree. Every believer, then and now, must earn a living, put food on the table, find shelter, care for family, maintain health, and seek to follow Jesus daily. In addition, though, the early church had to deal with extreme government-sponsored persecution.

When James writes, "*Are any among you suffering?*", the word he chooses literally means, "suffering hardship" or "enduring evil." Such suffering was common in the Christian community. It could be mental suffering, emotional suffering, spiritual suffering, or physical suffering.

For James, the remedy was the same. PRAY. You can do what you can do deal with the suffering, but you should never forget to pray. Bringing God into the midst of suffering, difficulty, and hardship is the believer's first resource, for it activates, by faith, the promises of God. It allows the believer the knowledge of God's presence, God's power, God's comfort, and God's peace.

Are you suffering? Pray.

What about the other end of the spectrum? If we are going to pray, it most likely will be when things do not go well. When things go well, we assume that they are supposed to go that way. We think this be the norm and that diversity and suffering should be the exception.

Who says so?

James tells us that if we are merry, of good cheer, or happy we should praise God. The Greek word is "*psallow*," the same root we use for the word Psalms. It means "to praise." The assumption is that the praise will be directed to God.

Having a rough time? Direct your prayers to God. Having a good time? Direct your praise to God! The Christian faith has always been a singing faith. Christians throughout the ages have survived and prospered because they have found God to be a source of help, comfort, and hope. The Christian community found an outlet in lament and elation in praise and joy, living out Paul's admonition to the Roman church, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*" (Romans 12:15)

If you are suffering, pray. If you are in good shape, praise God. If you are sick or weak, well, the literal translation reads of the sick or weak person, ". . . *let him call to himself the elders of the assembly and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord.*" What does it mean to be sick? The word used here is a broad term. It includes any physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological or relational problem that afflicts a person.

If you're sick or weak, who are you going to call? The elders. What are they going to do? Pray for you and anoint you with oil. Anointing oil is not magic sauce. Anointing oil is symbolic of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, just as the elders are representing the collective prayers of the Church. Anointing with oil is never practiced apart from prayer. They go together.

Notice also that anointing with oil for healing makes a huge assumption. The practice does not occur in a vacuum.

Healing prayer takes place in the context of Christian community. When you are sick, you are not alone. Christian community is assumed. You cannot call for the elders of the assembly to pray for you and anoint you with oil, if there is no assembly to which you belong whose elders you know to call.

If someone calls the elders, it must be assumed that the person calling cannot get to where the elders are. The elders must come to the person. The elders are acting in faith. It is faith in God. Not faith in prayer. Not

faith in anointing oil. Not faith in faith or even in the act of praying. The prayer is offered in the name of the Lord. That is, it is offered in Jesus' name.

James writes, *"The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven."* (James 5:15) Anytime we pray for the sick, we must do so in faith that God can heal, God does heal, and God will heal. God tells us to pray for the sick. If we are not obedient, we can be assured of the results. No prayer = no healing. Faithful prayer = healing as God wills.

Does prayer make a difference? A "... fertilization study -- conducted at a hospital in Seoul, Korea -- found a *doubling* of the pregnancy rate among women who were prayed for, says Rogerio A. Lobo, MD, chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Columbia University School of Medicine in New York City. His study appears in the September issue of the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine*.

"It's a highly-significant finding," Lobo tells WebMD. "I'm first to say we don't know what this means."ⁱ Alfred, Lord Tennyson penned, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of . . ." That certainly seems to be true.

We have briefly looked at the importance of prayer. We have briefly looked at the importance of community. Now, we turn to forgiveness.

Yes, sometimes forgiveness is an issue. The Jewish religion believed that sin was the cause of every sickness. Therefore, if a person was sick, a person would need to be forgiven before they could be cured. Today we know that is not true. However, we also know that sin can make us sick. Anger affects blood pressure. Stress does all manner of damage to our bodies. Worry can give us insomnia, ulcers, and lead to depression. If we are emotionally and spiritually unhealthy, we will eventually become physically unhealthy. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:31-32, *"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you."*

Forgiveness is important. Jesus has given that ministry to us. Sometimes the ministry of forgiveness will lead to physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. Jesus taught his disciples, *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* (John 20:23) We can seek God's forgiveness. We also can grant God's forgiveness.

James closes with an appeal to community and confession to close out this section on the prayer of faith. He writes, *"Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."* We confess to God. However, we are also to confess to one another.

Sometimes those interpersonal conflicts and hurts stand in the way of community. They, too, must be confessed. We sin against God. We also sin against each other. As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning, it is important to remember this.

We come confessing our brokenness and confess the ways in which we have sinned against God and other people. Pity the person who bears sin alone. Pity the person who has no one to whom they may confess, who has no one who, because of his or her own sin, understands. Have compassion for the one who has no one to say, "In Jesus' name, you are forgiven."

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Not because it is prayer. Not because the person or persons who offer the prayer are themselves righteous. Our prayers for healing are powerful and effective because there is One who makes us righteous, and He is the One who heals. He is our righteousness. He is our peace. By His stripes, we are healed. Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory. AMEN.

ⁱ <https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20011106/power-of-prayer-in-medicine#1>