

"Life Together"

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday September 26, 2021

James 5:13-20

The book of James is written by the half-brother of Jesus. It is written to help the church be the church. The document was written to people who claimed to love Jesus, people who had faith.

And James is telling them what the Christian community should look like. James doesn't pull any punches- he addresses how we speak, how we act, our posturing and trying to technically do the right thing, but still get our own advantage.

It is James who tells us that if we just hear God's word and don't do it we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. He calls us to be perfect, perfect meaning complete, a whole person – rightly related to God and the people around us – fulfilling the calling God has placed upon our lives, living full-complete lives.

So here we are at the end of the book, and we have a kind of snap shot of what our lives should look like as we live together as God's people. And the first thing that pops out at me is that we are to live together before God.

This Sunday we are celebrating the anniversary of our congregation. We have been together as a congregation for over 90 years. And James makes it clear that we can't live whole Christian lives without each other. Every part of our lives is to be shared with one another:

- Are any among you afflicted, facing trials or troubles, you should pray.
- Are any of you in good spirits, cheerful, joyful? You should praise.

Often, and maybe more often during this pandemic, people have said, "I really needed to be here this morning." They were afflicted or facing trials and troubles and they needed to be in the community and pray, and be encouraged. But what if the only people who showed up were the people who were in distress? I know that misery loves company – but where would the encouragement be?

At the teams meeting on Tuesday night we shared how we had seen God's greatness, how God had answered prayers, how God had been present in our lives, and it was so encouraging, so powerful. Hearing how God has worked in the lives of others, gives me courage for today and hope for tomorrow.

I want to encourage you not to miss church if you can. Other people need to see you. Your presence, your words, your smile, your encouragement may be what someone else needs. I also want to encourage you to come on Zoom a

few minutes early – and say good morning – to see how others are. Come to the church if you are able. Be a community of care for one another. On Zoom we can't have private one on one conversations, but we can call someone after church and ask how someone is.

Are any of you sick – not just facing an illness or pain, but broken, discouraged, struggling in faith, or fractured – the opposite of whole? Call the elders and have them pray for you and anoint you with oil. Prayer offered in faith in the name of the Lord will bring salvation, healing, wholeness, strength, and the Lord will raise him/her up.

“The Lord will raise him/her up.”

What do you hear from you hear those words?

- You might think about having the strength to get out of bed, or the lame man that was raised to his feet so he could walk and dance.
- You might think about the breath of God that raises us up to new hope, new faith, new joy.
- You might think about God who raises the dead to life everlasting.

Praying for each other, praying in faith for one another brings God's healing salvation, and resurrection life. Call for the elders! Call for people to pray. Call for the people of faith to come and pray with you and for you.

The next part about confessing your sins to one another is interesting. If someone has erred – is in a broken relationship with God, or with the people around them, they are to bind themselves in agreement with faithful people, share the burden with them, and have them pray so that you may be restored, healed, set free and brought to wholeness. Faithful prayer, prayer of a faithful person accomplishes much, because we serve a great God.

And then James reminds us that Elijah was a person, fully human just like us, but he did incredible things for God. Elijah lived in the time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, the people were not following God's ways- the King was leading people astray – but Elijah as a great prophet, a great person of God. God did great things through Elijah. Elijah was told by God to pray and no rain fell. God told Elijah to pray again, and the rains fell and the earth was healed and a harvest- a time of abundance was brought in. God's mission is to bring salvation, to bring wholeness to the whole earth – to bring us all to the place where we are living full lives before the Lord, in fellowship with one another.

We have been called to be part of God's mission, so if you help someone who is being deceived, or is wandering, or is struggling, and you help them get back on the right path, you are part of God's healing forgiveness for the world. WE are in this together! Thanks be to God!