

**“Life Together”**  
**By Rev. Frances Savill**  
**Sunday September 29, 2024**

**Readings:**

**James 5:13-20 | Mark 9:38-50**

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 of 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 99 or 140 years, depending how you count it!

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, actually very often, people say to me, "I really needed to be here 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?

Very often in conversation together we hear how we have seen God's greatness, how God has answered prayers, how God had been present in our lives, and it is 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.

Come to the church if you are able.

Be a community of care for one another.

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, call any elder including me, 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 you 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, wholeness, 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.

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.

From our gospel reading we have a situation where the disciples are concerned about people who don't follow Jesus as they did.

I'm sure Jesus' words had one context when he spoke them to the disciples, but the disciples remembered and shared those words with the early church as they worked side by side with other early Christian communities who were different.

The disciples, saw themselves as the leaders of the fledgling Jesus movement, more important than others doing works in Jesus' name, the inner circle who should be obeyed by lesser disciples. What's striking, of course, is that all this happens almost immediately after Jesus chided their earlier arguments about which of them was the greatest. It seems that all Jesus' admonishment did was to

encourage them to give up vying amongst themselves so that they could vie together against everyone else!

When Jesus sees this happen with his disciples, he responds by inviting them, as we saw last week, to entertain the peculiar logic of God's kingdom where the weak and vulnerable are to be honored and where glory comes through service.

This is the way of the cross.

This week, he reiterates his counsel that mercy and love are the vehicles through which we discover and express our identity and our leadership.

And one of the great things about service, love, and mercy is that you never run out of them. There is no scarcity of opportunity to care for others, no lack of occasions to love your neighbor.

We are given our identity as a church, as leaders, and as God's people, by Jesus who has called each one of us to mercy and service.

Long ago, 99 years ago, members of this congregation stood before God and pledged themselves to use this church building for the preaching of the gospel, the celebration of new life in baptism and the gifts received at our Lord's table.

This church was established to comfort those who mourn, to provide strength and light for those struggling to find their way.

This church was built for sharing Christ with our neighbours, for the increase of justice in our public life; and the healing of the nations.

And they dedicated themselves to worship, to growing as disciples of Jesus, and building up the household of God, from youngest to oldest.

This is still who we are.

We are called together by Jesus our Lord.

We need each other; we are one part of the body of Christ that stretches through this community and around the world.

We are part of God's healing wholeness for the world.

**WE** are in this together!

Thanks be to God!