

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Doing the Thing

Sermon Reflection Notes

In his open letter to the church at large, James makes his brash views quite clear: a faith that does not make the world more just, more wise, more beautiful, or more caring toward others is no faith at all. The book of James concludes with the unequivocal invitation to pray. We (the congregation) are called to pray together when we are hurting, when we are sick, when we need forgiveness. We are called to pray like Elijah, we are called to pray like the Psalmist, and we are called to pray like Jesus. And yet, prayer remains difficult for many of us. Even Rev. Beaton said he doesn't feel like he's that good at praying. We are called to pray, but we doubt our abilities. We are called to pray, but we struggle with how to pray. We are called to pray, but we aren't sure what to say. Just like we practice speaking like a mature, wise Christian, we can practice praying. We have many teachers and role models who will help us learn to pray.

Pastor Ron has suggested that prayer is not "another tool in our toolbox" to help us to achieve the goals we want. Rather, prayer is about our relationship, both with God and with each other. Prayer is both speaking and listening. Prayer is being in the presence of God where we are called to align our life with the God's good purpose for us and the world. Prayer means to come close to the heart of God.

James witnesses to a world that has a radically different focus. James calls us into a community where there is integrity in thought, in speech, in action – as opposed to a world that lives by the logic of envy, greed and individualism, competition and violence. We may feel uncomfortable with praying together, with confessing our sins to one another, but that is what James instructs us to do. After all, we are all connected; there is no such thing as an individual sin or an individual need. We may struggle with being vulnerable, but it is in our vulnerability that relationships grow. Life is hard. It is beautiful, but it is hard.

Let the teachers and role models who have gone before us teach us to pray unceasingly. May we grow comfortable as a community of faith, learning together to speak the language of God, the language of love.

Scripture

James 5:13- 20 (NRSVUE)

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are 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. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore 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. ¹⁷Elijah was a human 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. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth yielded its harvest.

¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the people in your family and among your friends who are willing to pray in a gathering (before a meal, to open or close a meeting, etc.) Are you thinking, "Not me!"? Why? What emotions are tied to this experience?
2. So, those of us who were thinking "Not me!" about praying at a gathering, how do we move from "Not me!" to "Okay, I can do that."?
3. Rev. Beaton said that prayer is NOT just a tool, like our microwave or our lawnmower. It is not just a thing in the toolbox we pull out when we need to do or fix something. What does he mean by this? How is this idea different from other ways you've heard prayer discussed or defined?
4. Rev. Beaton said that we are all connected; there is no such thing as an individual sin or individual need. Let's talk about that. Do you agree? What drives people to "sin," what creates need? Where is our connection to those things?
5. What are simple, accessible resources we could use to practice deliberate praying this week? What prayer time can you commit to every day this week?
 - *We will check back in next week to ask how the prayers went.*

Closing Prayer

O God, we gladly confess that you are our God and we are your people. We recognize that you call us to be friends with you, that you want us to be in daily conversation with you and you call us toward gratitude and praise. All too often we are fearful that we do not know how to pray. And yet, you have taught us to pray through Scripture, through the cloud of witnesses who prayed before us, through each other. Help us to be in your presence each day that we may become our best selves – in love with you and in love with our neighbors. May your grace and truth be matched by our wonder, love, and praise. We pray in the name of Jesus, who prayed, so that we might learn to pray. Amen.

"The answer is always prayer. Even if you don't know the question. The answer is prayer."