

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God”

James 5:13-20 - A prayer of faith

Our reading today from the book of James is a “should” text. What should you do? You should pray if you are suffering, you should sing songs of praises if you are happy - just another expression on prayer! If you are sick you should call for the elders of the Church to pray over you and to anoint you. And the passage ends the same way - what do you do with those who have wandered? You should bring them back.

There are a lot of “shoulds” in this short ending to James’ book.

And we humans are often not very good about the “shoulds”!

We should eat less, drink less, floss more, exercise more, connect with friends and family more, put away the phone or tablet, etc etc etc

Sometimes it feels like our lives are one long list of “shoulds”.

Perhaps we have even added to this list aspects of our faith life. We should pray more, go to Church more, donate more etc etc etc.

The “shoulds” add up to a whole lot of guilt. And maybe then we rebel - we are tired of the “shoulds” and so we do what we know we should not do!

James did not write these words to add guilt to your life.

James is reminding us of the words of Paul from 1 Thessalonians 5:17 - pray without ceasing or to pray in all things and all circumstances from Philomen 4:6.

James did not write these words to add guilt to your life.

James wrote about the importance of prayer to the Christian life and to the life of the Christian community. These words are not just about individual prayer practices. Not only about what you do or how you pray on your own.

James asks us to examine our practice of prayer. In this scripture passage it is focussed on communal

healing - not on personal situations.

James is talking about community. The marks of the Christian community include praying for those who are ill, those in need, celebrating with those who are in good health, restoring those who have strayed, confessing sins to one another and offering forgiveness to one another.

And for James all of this comes because of and through prayer. Lifting up one another in prayer - the prayers of the community - entrusting one another to God - these are bold acts of faith.

The ending of James' book is called a prayer of faith.

And while it sounds like a lot of "shoulds" it is really about the power of prayer. James reminds us that whatever we do - whatever our circumstances - whatever the circumstances of those we pray for - those that we know and those we do not know. God hears our prayers.

James asks us to pray when we are suffering and when we are joyful. Why? Does this make sense? Only if

prayer can effect change and prayer can only effect change if God hears and responds to prayer.

I know a couple who keep a prayer journal of those people that they pray for and the petitions that they pray and they also keep a record of how those prayers have been answered. They know that prayers are answered - that they are heard - that prayer is effective because they have seen it happen.

Perhaps you too have had this experience?

Prayer changes lives and has saving potential.

But James also believes that praying together in community shapes the community - creating a community where people are committed to each other. Praying together keeps a community together. For James prayer is a cure for the things that are toxic in our world.

As we have moved through waves of pandemic, worshiping remotely or in the garden we have prayed. Prayer has been something that has sustained us when

we felt we were not praying together - but we were.
Each time you lifted your voice in praise or in sorrow or
in frustration or anger - you kept the conversation with
God going and you kept the community together.

Each time you just faced God in silence - when no
words came - you kept the conversation with God going
and you kept our community together.

Prayer changes things. In communal prayer we have
the opportunity to listen for and be God's voice in the
world. Prayer knits a community together. James
knew this and so he gives us the list of "shoulds".

Pray if you are suffering, praise if you are joyful, call for
prayers if you are sick, confess to one another, forgive
one another.

Prayer is the proper response of God's people and as a
congregation it "should" be our 1st practice.

AMEN