

## “Faithful Prayer and Prayerful Life”

James 5: 13-20

Several years ago, one Tuesday afternoon, I was contacted by a bank. The church I had served had an account open at the bank. The bank representative told me that they had found that one of bills the church had deposited into the bank after a Sunday offering, a one hundred dollar bill, was flagged as a counterfeit bill. I visited the bank and asked for the counterfeit bill to keep as evidence, but the bank would not release it back to me.

Then, I called the treasurer of the church to find out who might have given that bill. The treasurer found the giver's name. The giver was a woman I had known for several years, but who was not a regular member of the church. She attended occasionally, and was an owner of a motel. I visited the motel owner and told her about the counterfeit bill which the bank reported. I asked if she was the person who had deposited a one hundred dollar bill for the church offering. She admitted that she was the giver, but she didn't know the one hundred dollar bill was a counterfeit. She said that a customer, who seemed like he was from South America, had paid for accommodation with that bill. Of course, she gave me a new hundred dollar bill, replacing the fake one, but both she and I felt sorry for what had happened.

Fake money is useless and illegal. If paper currency were printed on only one side, that would certainly be fake money. Once, Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher said, “If you do not pray, even though you profess you are a Christian, you are an existential atheist.” “Faith and Prayer” are like two sides of one coin in Christian life. That means you are a fake Christian if you do not pray while you profess that you trust in God. It is just like a one-sided-printed bill.

Everybody relies on something. If you do not rely on God, then to what do you rely on? Money? Knowledge? Someone with whom you have a relationship? Your strength or ability? The Bible teaches us not to rely on anything that is perishable. We are instructed that it is especially foolish simply to trust in oneself.

The Christian's highest duty and greatest privilege is communication with God, which is prayer. Today's Scripture reading, The Epistle of James, chapter five, reminds us the importance of prayer in Christian life. The more the emphasis on prayer life, the better the teaching on Christian life. The apostle James shows us how to pray, what to pray, and when to pray in the context of the church community. Here are three occasions in which we need to pray together.

First of all, when anyone in our community is sick, healing prayer is needed in the church community. A church is a healing community. You and I are called to be healers to those who are wounded by scar and suffering.

The Apostle James, therefore, writes, “Is anyone among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.” One form of affliction is illness. Suffering is a wholly general

term, including both sorrow and sickness. Therefore, healing prayer is a common need by all. After healing prayer, we have experience that God's grace appears in the midst of the sickness and manifests in the life of the person who is suffering. God's presence and grace among us is the source of true healing, and a source of overwhelming joy and cause for thanksgiving. On such occasions, even in the ancient church, the congregation gathered to pray together with songs of praise. The Bible exhorts us to sing praises to God, wherever we are in life.

Prayer in times of illness is both our duty and privilege in Christ. In our church, we have a prayer lunch group every Wednesday at noon. We lift up the names of those who are requested by the members during the prayer meeting. Some are names with which we may not be familiar, but we share our prayer concerns and learn about all who are lifted up for prayer, and pray together for them. I wish more people participated in the prayer group, and that we could pray together longer.

The practice of anointing with oil is also an ancient form of prayer. Anointing with oil is a symbol of obedience to the admonition of God's Word, and also a form of encouragement to the faith of the sick. If at one time anointing was considered a natural therapy for healing, it is clear that anointing also had a spiritual significance, for it was to be administered in the name of the Lord. In any case, the emphasis in anointing prayer, as with any prayer, is that it is the prayer of faith that shall heal the sick, and the belief that the Lord shall raise the sick up.

A Second occasion for communal prayer is whenever special occasions occur in the church.

A famous Christian writer and thinker, C. S. Lewis once said about the difference between the maker of something and the deliverer of a baby. There is a deep gap between the two; making and begetting. To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. The maker and the being made are not homogeneous. And the difference is this.

When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set. But the deliverer and the baby are homogeneous. There is no gap in relationship and dialogue between them.

Being a Christian is not a process of making a person but a process of being born again by the Spirit. After being born again by the Spirit, we become children of God. You and I were called as adopted children of God, and there is no gap in dialogue and relationship between God and us. God allows us to call Him, "Abba, Father!" A prayer is communication with God in relationship, as that between Father and child.

When I was a boy, I lived where there was a big and deep community well. There were fifteen houses in my neighborhood and we shared the well. There was water enough in the well to share for cooking, drinking, and cleaning. The water was very fresh. Later, my family moved to Seoul, the big, capital city of S. Korea. In Seoul, there was new development, and

small neighborhoods has been replaced by a booming urban community with hundreds and hundreds of houses and apartments everywhere. After the area was developed and rebuilt, the water became polluted and wells were no longer useful. Running water through plumbing, instead of water from wells, became the fashion for Seoul residents.

Before the development of science and technology in the modern world, many people prayed for rain when there was a drought. But, now, only a very a few people would pray for bad weather in the cities. Many have lost all confidence that prayers, even of a righteous man, have any real effect. My message is that whether our life circumstance be changed or not, through our prayers, our relationship between God and us remains the same.

The reference to Elijah, who, because he was a righteous man, was able—by praying—to effect a drought that lasted three years and six months, is hardly as effective an encouragement to prayer as it was in days gone by. Our knowledge of modern science, the existence of weather bureaus and meteorologists, make us skeptical of such a tale. Have our changed notions as to the workings of nature affected our ideas of prayer?

Lastly, prayer is a mandate when there is conflict and reconciliation is needed. Prayer for the ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of Christ. I heard from the news that some group of Christians announced publicly that they are praying for President Obama to die. To cause people harm and to curse people is not the spirit of prayer. The spirit of prayer is to build the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit. If you have any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” (Philippians 2:1-3) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. This is the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus showed us with himself as the ultimate example.

The Apostle said, “My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back...” There was no sharp division between clergy and laity in those days, and the rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman world can be largely attributed to the fact that the humblest of Christians accepted the responsibility of witnessing to the gospel among pagan neighbors.

A Christian church is not a social club with an exclusive membership; it is open to all on the sole term of repentance. Neither is it simply an ethical culture society for the self-improvement of its members. It is the reconciling agent of the kingdom which knows no boundaries; it is the servant of the abundant love of God which is for all peoples. He “reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthian. 5:18)

When James speaks of “any of you” (v. 19) and “the sinner” (v. 20) he helps us to remember our Lord’s concern for the one lost sheep and the one prodigal son. For all of his social teaching, James does not lose sight of the supreme value of the individual soul.

When we recover a Christian from backsliding, as when we lead a man to Christ, we save a soul from death – from spiritual death in this life, and from eternal death hereafter.

In conclusion, I would like ask a question, “When may we expect our prayers to bring an answer from God?” James makes it clear that prayers of this kind must come from a righteous man, that is, one who is in right relationship with God and man. He gave us an illustration of Elijah’s prayer for rain. Do we have a righteous man or woman among us? Who is he or she? “I am not!” Then who can pray effectively?

There was an old man who insisted that he would not change any of his lifestyle. So, kept his old lifestyle no matter how the world changed. He had no electricity, no television and no electric oven because he thought that these cost too much and were a waste of money. One winter day, he was invited by his neighbor. When he visited his neighbor, he saw the use of electricity in the house, but ignored it. However, the one thing he was excited about was a thermostat on the wall. Then the host moved the thermostat gage a bit higher, the room became warmer and felt good. So, the guest asked him, pointing to the thermostat, “What is this?” “Thermostat,” the host answered. “Is this expensive?” he asked him again. “No not at all. You can buy it for a few bucks” he answered. “Where can I buy it?” the curious man asked again. “At the hardware store.” the host answered.

After visiting the neighbor’s house, the stingy old man went to a hardware store and bought a thermostat and installed it on his wall. He fixed the gauge on high and waited and waited for his room to get warm, but it didn’t.

The next day, the old man visited the neighbor and told him what he bought and installed on his wall, and told him that it didn’t work. The neighbor visited the old man’s house and found the there was no electricity in his house, and advised him to get electricity in this cold winter! So, the old man had to visit the public service office to have electricity turned on. There was light in his house, every room was bright, and the atmosphere of the house was changed. He was pleased. But, the rooms were still cold.

The old man visited the neighbor again and told him that he now had electricity and the thermostat, but the room was still cold. The neighbor visited the old man’s house again and asked, “Where is the furnace room?” The old man asked what the furnace room was. The neighbor took the old man to his house and showed him the furnace room where there was a flame burning. It was then the old man realized that to warm the rooms, three things needed to be connected: a thermostat, electricity and a furnace.

Effective prayer needs to be connected to three things: lips, mind and heart. If you can pray with your lips for someone with whom you are in an uncomfortable relationship, you should wish for the person’s wellbeing and be wiling to call him or her to say that you are willing to reconcile that relationship. That is prayer which is connected by lips, mind and heart. Then, the Spirit will guide your heart into the kingdom of God. That is the prayer of the righteous and effective prayer in community.

May we all grow together in faithful prayer and a prayerful life.