

Proper 21 Year B

9/26/2021

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22; Psalm 124; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

Our worship today is initiated with our opening collect...

The prayer that invites us into worship...

Introduces us to the readings...

As a guide and an interpreter...

We prayed these words:

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure...

It's a beautiful and profound prayer.

And it's thought provoking...

Just pause on the first line:

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity...

That is the same God of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

That is the same God of today.

For God does not change...

So, even today God's almighty power is mostly declared in showing mercy and pity.

And if we are reflections of God Incarnate...

the person Jesus Christ...

We should be mostly known by our declaration of the mercy and pity of God.

And in so doing...

We pray... as our collect guides us:

Grant us Lord the fullness of your grace.

The fullness of God's grace...

His gift...

His love...

His goodness toward us.

This grace is the richness and majesty of God bestowed upon us.

For that is the Gospel of our Lord...

A declaration of God's grace toward those who believe and repent in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Because of his sacrifice on the cross..

And in so doing...
we find the fullness of God's grace.

And in our second reading from the Letter of James...
We find this theme of mercy and pity and God's grace.
James points out that we receive the grace of God in the prayers of
clergy and laity as we pray for each other.

Listen again to the words of St. James this time from *The Message*
paraphrase:

Are you hurting? Pray.

Do you feel great? Sing.

*Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you
with oil in the name of the Master.*

Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet.

And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

*Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and
pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.*

It's a powerful part of Holy Scripture.

And the call...

the invitation is for the church to be a place of prayer.

Our text mentions the word **prayer** seven times...

And it says that we are to be a people of prayer in two ways.

But before we get to those two ways...

Let us take notice that the call toward prayer is done in community.

In the church.

Not that we shouldn't pray alone...

Of course, we should pray in our quiet times.

The scriptures tell us to pray without ceasing...

That would include times when we are alone.

Jesus prayed when he was alone...

So, we should certainly pray in our alone time.

But specifically, here in this text, we are called to pray when we gather together.

When we gather for church, for Bible study, for times when we come together.

And what should we pray for?

St. James mentions two things:

For the healing of the sick and for the forgiveness of sins.

“If you’re sick” says James, “have the leaders of the church pray for you.”

To anoint them with oil in the name of Jesus...

And believe for healing.

This is why every Sunday after we receive the sacrament of communion, we invite those that would come to receive prayers of healing.

Every Wednesday we have a Eucharist where we specifically pray for Christ’s healing in the world and in the lives of those who are present.

We even have a special healing service coming up next week.

Christ Jesus still heals today...

And not just physically...

But also in our emotions, in our minds and souls...

God wants us to be made whole.

In the fullness of his grace.

This we believe, proclaim, and practice.

These prayers we practice together...

Praying for the sick that they would recover.

And (number two) we pray for the forgiveness of sins.

St. James writes:

...confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

Because we so often think of our sins as only a private thing between me and God we can miss out on true healing from our sins.

We keep it quiet...

Where the truth of scripture is that confession is the balm for the soul.

We confess our sins to one another...

And then we pray for one another.

Not a gossip thing...

But a healing thing.

This is why when we meet for worship, we have confession of our sins...

Not just privately...

We have the peace that we share...

A time when if we need to go to someone in the church and ask for their forgiveness, we do so...

Before we receive the body of Christ.

And let me say this about forgiveness.

The Biblical word used when we have sinned against someone...

When we sin against someone...

Is the word **forgiveness**.

So often we use the more cultural words of an apology or to say I am sorry.

Which are good starts...

But there is a whole deeper level of reconciliation when we ask the person, we have sinned against to forgive us.

It is much more vulnerable.

“I have wronged you in this way... will you forgive me?”

And hopefully they will extend that pardon...

That forgiveness.

To just say, “I am sorry” or “I apologize” is just not on the same level.

When we prayerfully confess to one another the sins that we have done...

It is vulnerable...

It is humble...

But it is also healing.

St. James shows us two primary practices of the church.

Healing both inside and out.

Healing physically... in both body and mind...

And healing spiritually... in the confession of sin.

We practice both forms in our liturgy...

Prayerful words and actions asking God to bring us healing and forgiveness.

There are going to be times when we are sick...

Emotionally, physically, whatever...

When we aren't right.

God shows us his mercy and pity...

And we pray together for God's healing.

There are going to be times when we sin...

And we need forgiveness...

We need to be restored... reconciled...

God shows us his mercy and pity...

And we pray together for God's healing.

God wants us to be whole...
To have the fullness of His grace.

And it is through the Church...
Through the community of his people that he extends that healing and
forgiveness.

St. James reminds us today...
That we experience God in the community of his people...
And we experience the fullness of his grace...
When God shows us his mercy and pity.

May we not hold this to ourselves...
But may we go into this world and share God's mercy and pity in our
homes... in our communities...
This is one of the reasons why I so love our outreach that we had
yesterday... and each month...
Drive Thru Prayer...
A chance to pray for God's healing and forgiveness with strangers who
come by and say, "I need prayer."

And this can also happen anytime.

At Publix, a walk downtown, or wherever you go...

Be open and listening to the Holy Spirit guiding you each day.

Be ready to pray...

Be ready to pray for healing and forgiveness...

And be ready for God to show through you...

His mercy and pity in this world.

Our world...

Our nation...

Our neighborhoods...

Need the people of God.

May we shine the light of Christ...

The light of his mercy and pity and grace.

Amen.