

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

James 5:13-20

The Letter of James is all about doing. James says that what we do is as important as what we think or believe. He says, near the beginning of his letter that we should be doers of the word and not hearers only. He says that if our faith is not being put into action, it's not really faith at all. Faith without some action is dead!

James talks about how we can be doers of the word. He speaks of helping the needy. He talks about prejudice and favouritism. He even talks about how we talk. But he concludes by talking about prayer. James is all about doing. Most people don't think that praying is doing anything. But James insists that the prayers of the faithful are effective. They are powerful and by them people are saved!

James says if any of us are in trouble, we should pray, if we are sick, call on the church to pray for us, if we have sinned, confess because "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him or her up". Now that is a bold statement! James says that faithful prayers will heal the sick and raise people above their troubles! Behind that bold statement are some leaps of faith. There are several "spiritual assumptions" or articles of faith that lie behind this belief in the power of prayer. To get to this bold belief, James has to trust God on several points. Let us examine those articles or leaps of faith today.

The first leap of faith is that someone is listening. Many people, even some Christian's, think that praying is talking to yourself.

They think that praying for someone else is just like saying “Get well soon”. It expresses their feeling, but does not affect anything, because they assume that no one is listening.

The story goes that a pastor asked a church member to say a prayer in the service. That church didn’t have a sound system and as a result some of the members of the congregation could not hear. Someone complained, yelling I can’t hear you, speak louder. The man kept praying, but not any louder. The complainer hollered again, “I can't hear you, speak up!” Finally the man doing the praying stopped and replied, “I wasn’t talking to you”.

Prayer is not just talking to ourselves or to the air. There is a God who listens. God hears our prayers. When we pray we are addressing the Almighty. That can be a scary thought. If the Prime Minister were here, wouldn’t you choose your words carefully? If you were going to address the Archbishop of Canterbury, would you think first about what you want to say?

But, we are talking about someone infinitely greater than the Prime Minister or the Archbishop of Canterbury. And he already knows us better than we know ourselves. He loves us and is listening!

That brings us to the second leap of faith: that God cares. Even if we could address the Prime Minister or the Archbishop of Canterbury, would they care? They might listen to our little problems, but they have the weight of the world on their shoulders. Would it really matter to them, would they care?

Probably not. God cares for us and the everyday concerns of our lives because he loves us.

We love our children. We can share all sort of things about them. We could talk about their hair, its colour and who they may have inherited it from. But we have to admit, as much as

we know about our children, we don't know how many hairs are on their heads. We have never bothered to count them. But God has. God has numbered the hairs on their heads because God loves our children even more than we do, more than we can. If that is not enough proof that God cares, then just take Jesus as a proof of God's love. "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners!" Jesus gave His life, not just for people who had already committed themselves to try to live right, but for those who were still dedicated to living wrong. If He cares enough to die for us, then surely He will listen to us when we pray. The third leap of faith is that, once God has listened, He will do something. A lot of people think of God as sitting up in heaven looking down on the world observing us, but not really getting involved. They think the universe is a great machine that God designed and built. God put all the gears in place, and like a master clock builder, He wound the key and started the mechanism and then stepped back. In this understanding, the universe is running by itself and God is just sitting back and watching.

James, and the rest of the Bible for that matter, present a different view. The Bible describes a God who is intimately involved in the universe. God walked with Adam and Eve. God spoke to Noah and Abraham. God rained down fire for the prophet Elijah and appeared to Ezekiel, to Isaiah and to John.

God's Son even made a special resurrected appearance for Paul. God is involved.

Many of us have had prayers that we thought were not answered, so we assumed that God, even if He heard them, decided not to answer. But that is where the leap of faith comes in. Faith is believing in things that we cannot see. There are times when parents do not give their children the things they

want, or even thought that they needed. They did that because they knew that those things were really not good for them, or that the time was not right. Our heavenly father is the same way. Sometimes He says “no” or “not yet” because He knows what is best for us, but He does respond to our prayers.

If any of us gathered here today are in trouble; if any of us are having a wonderful day; if any of us are having a miserable day; if any of us are sick; if any of us need forgiveness, then let us do something about it. Rather than just sitting here let us turn to God! If we say we believe in God then let us do something to demonstrate it. Let us call on God in prayer when we face trouble. Let us praise God when things go good! Let us ask our fellow Christians for prayer when we are sick. Let us all be doers of the Word of God and not just hearers. Let us take a leap of faith and trust that God is there, and that He is listening, and that He will answer our prayers!

AMEN.