

“Six Ways God Heals”

James 5:13ff covers ways Christ heals: Praise, Prayer, Professional Health Personnel, Prayer with oil, and confession

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 2602 Gilmer Avenue, Tallahassee, AL 36078 on Sunday, September 30, Proper 21B

Text: James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50; Collect, *“O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of your grace....BoCP, page 234*

I Your vivid story of physical or mental healing!

We all have a story or incident of healing. For me, a pickup fell on me in 9th grade accident. A second story is the survival of my oldest son from a car accident resulting in a crushed liver and organs. Last Tuesday, while substituting for the rector’s Tuesday men’s Bible study, 20 men to shared vivid experiences of healing of themselves or that of a close friend. Each man took less than two minutes to tell his experience. Here are some of the stories I heard: The death of a young wife with breast cancer; a son dying from a car accident; a survivor of a car accident at Auburn in which two students died; the removal of cancer by surgery; a heart valve replacement; the daily prayer of a small business owner with six employees. Do you have a story in which Christ intervened in your life? It could be dramatic or a gradual process.

II Listen to these alliterations of the letter “P” in the Epistle Lesson

James 5:13ff covers 6 ways Christ heals: Healing: Praise, Prayer, Professional Health Personnel, Prayer with Oil, and Confession. But first look at a few background facts on the Letter of James: The writer is a leader in the early church in Jerusalem who may be James the brother of Jesus. This earliest book in the NT is book of proverbs, and a new topic begins with a question in a letter about Christian behaviors mentioned in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The letter does not mention Jesus as Lord, and in in the first two centuries James is not

mentioned in early Christian writings. Martin Luther, in the 1500s did not like the content of James' letter because there is no emphasis on grace.

III First "P": Praise, sing

If you are cheerful and happy, then sing songs of praise. This phrase is in the imperative! Something happens in our attitudes, moods, feelings, and mental processes when singing praise. Adoration is praising God for who he is, not for what he did for us. Adoring a member of the family for their nature manifests affirmation.... "You are so kind, I adore your positive attitude, I love your calmness, I love that you are cheerful." Cannot the cheerfulness flood your entire body by singing?

The early church was a singing congregation. When the Roman Empire did not recognize the church as a legitimate religion, one official wrote, *"They gather early on the first day of the week and sing choruses to Jesus as Lord."*

In our liturgy we have lots of singing praising God. There is nothing wrong with a said Eucharist but in singing, something seems to happen under our skin. Sometimes a phrase in the song will move me emotionally and I will tear up or shake my bottom lip. Jesus seems to be saying, "Arnold, the brief emotion is just a touch from me."

On the Sunday of Labor Day, Zoe and I worshiped with our youngest daughter at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Jackson, MS. One of the ushers that Sunday was Dr. Jim Baugh, a well-known professional psychologist who counseled me in the late 1980s. Jim had aged after my not seeing him for 22 years ago. I did several workshops for our congregation while rector of St. Peter's by the Lake, and I recall asking him about some therapy groups in the Jackson area such as, Alanon, AA, grief and divorce recovery, etc. I recall his saying there is a large group down at the Cathedral lead by the director of music, John Paul. "They meet every Thursday night for almost 2 hours practicing anthems, traditional and contemporary music, and a lot of therapy goes on while they are practicing." During those Thursday night sessions

these things are happening: Acceptance, belonging, praising God with voice and body, deep breathing, self-confidence spreading through the choir and besides that, they have joyful social parties.

IV Two kinds of Prayer: Petition and Prayer of faith

The God we worship here is a God of Grace and Love. God's will for us is wholeness and healing! This morning the book study is about healing . In this chapter Diane Butler Bass states (page 104) We get the word "salvation," meaning "be saved" from the word *SALVUS*. This means "to Heal."

God's will is for us to be Whole, Well, and in Harmony with God and others. We must remember not to have this dichotomy or dualism on the one hand healing by surgery, medications, or physical therapy and on the other hand, Prayer. I have known folks who are reluctant to pray for themselves. They say, "to pray for myself is a selfish prayer". The God of the Bible, this Jesus I know, wants you well, and his will for you is healing. Petitionary Prayer is cooperating with his will of healing. Pray for your physician, the procedure, the medications you are taking, the lab, radiology, the sonogram technician. Okay, now to this phrase in the letter of James, "the prayer of faith," or as other modern translations say, "Believing-prayer" will save the sick.

Sometimes, persons are reluctant to place their name on a parish prayer list. Why? They have heard the negative, unbelieving prayers of some. If the pastor announces, so and so is having open heart surgery or a pathology report says she has cancer, some folks in their prayer images see that person being buried or dying too young. In regard to healing, we do not need to pray that guidance prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "LORD IF IT BE THY WILL let this suffering pass from me." In matters of healing, do not pray, "If it is your will, please let Miss... or Mr... not die soon." I admonish you to pray in matters of emotional and physical healing, "Lord, may your will of wholeness be accomplished in Use prayer images of that person functioning as a father or mother, working and competent in their responsibilities.

May everyone in this congregation have “believing- prayer” asking a gracious God to bring in power to heal the mind, body and soul.

V Professional Health physician or assistant

We all need to remind ourselves that the Episcopal Church is not a branch of Christian Science. We are not a conservative branch of Christianity. Going to MD or health professional is not contrary to God’s will. I have heard regular church goers say, “We going to pray that God will heal you so you will not have to go the see a doctor”. Instead, pray something like this, “We will pray for you now and pray for you as you are examined by a doctor so their procedures may make the proper diagnosis. Use the prayer of faith imaging that the correct surgery and medications are prescribed.

Listen to these phrases taken from the BoCP, 459, prayers for the sick. Before an operation: *“And bless the means made use of his/her cure.”* Also, *“Strengthen your servant N... to do what he/she has to do and bear what he/she has to bear; that, accepting your healing gifts through the skill of surgeons and nurses, he or she may be restored to usefulness in your world with a thankful heart through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

Before leaving how God uses medical science, I am not elaborating on Wellness Practices. I have been to two seminars on wellness practices. This is a fascinating statistic of what I have read and heard regarding a percentage of sickness in the USA. Of all folks experiencing sickness in the USA: 70% to 90 % of all sickness in the USA is preventable by LIFE STYLE CHANGES. LIFE STYLE CHANGES INCLUDE these: nutrition, exercise, safety factors, rest, leisure and elimination of stress. I, for one, am making some habits that will affect my wellness.

Thanks you Jesus for all the health professionals in Tallassee and Montgomery who not only treat us but who also teach us how to practice wellness.

VI Prayer with Laying on of hands or anointing with oil

This question in James, *"Are any among you sick?"* The translation from the Greek word, *"kamnomia"*, means hopelessly sick or wasting away. *"If sick, then call on the elders of the church and pray over them anointing them with oil, and the Lord will raise them up."* So this a snapshot of what was going on in the early Church.

I am thankful for Peter Horn, who supplied here a few months ago, for suggesting to me to administer oil, the sacrament of Unction, at the communion rail. . While in previous parishes, we administered anointing of oil at the Sunday Eucharist or on Wednesday night. What is happening as you are anointed with oil? First, you are saying to Christ, I need you to heal this hurt; I need you to work in my mind, or body to overcome this infirmity. Or, as we said to our children, let me kiss it where it hurts. Second, we are asking the Holy Spirit to drive away the infirmity. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "deliver us from evil." We are asking Him to remove this illness from us. Then we pray that God will send His Holy Spirit to heal our bodies, hearts, and minds. We do this in believing this will be an encounter with Christ and out of obedience to Jesus' command (See BoCP, page 456). In many Episcopal Churches, we have prayer teams where after receiving communion, a person goes over to another prayer rail and two trained lay persons anoint or lay hands on the people after those persons have stated their needs. Last Tuesday, a father stated that his teen aged girl was anointed by a priest resulting in a restoration of the tissue in her ear. Over the years in attending conferences and asking lay persons to pray for me, I have received guidance, healing of an injured back, and successful surgeries for rotator cuff and prostate cancer. One reason some folks do not ask for anointing is they are waiting for a BIG PROBLEM. Have you ever heard someone say, "So and so is having a little surgery this week as an outpatient."? But when the patient is you, "your surgery it is not little, but BIG surgery."

Christ encounters us in the sacrament of Holy Communion and in Holy Unction.

VII Therefore confess your sins to one another...so you may be healed. The Phillips translation says: *"You should get in the habit of admitting your sins to one another, and praying for one another, so that if sickness comes to you, you may be healed."*

Eugene Peterson in "The Message" has this paraphrase: "Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you can live together whole and healed."

In the chapter on "Healing" for adult study this morning, Diane Bass has a helpful chapter on congregational relationships being in harmony and experiencing God's "Shalom." I have been in a small group every week from the 1960s. My first one was in Gulf Breeze FL. Once trust is developed in a small group, members begin sharing their personal victories and their failures. Also, they share what they promised to do in the past week, but often they have failed to accomplish that weekly goal. Often a person confesses that he forgot, or confessed that he chickened out or that they messed up. The group affirms him and he leave the group who are reminding each other that **ONE IS NOT A FAILURE, BUT ONE HAS HAD FAILING EXPERIENCES.**

Have you ever had this scenario? You are at a social setting, or social hour, and the conversation comes up about your grown children and grandchildren and all their successes. Three or four are telling positive, success stories as if all their offspring were "saints with no problems." This is one level of sharing. However, during the next week their trusted small group meets, and these same people are discussing their grown children and grandchildren. In the small group where it is safe, some begin to share the disappointments, failures and hurt feelings.

In a given congregation, what needs to happen for members to confess their sins to one another? Is it the boldness of the speaker, talking too much, or inappropriate sharing? No. In the relationships within the congregation there has to be a sense of Forgiveness. **WE WILL NOT CONFESS OUR SINS TO AN UNFORGIVING GOD OR TO AN UNFORGIVING FRIEND.**

Conclusion: What habits are you going to initiate in what James is telling the early Church? Review the ways of healing.