

Barre Congregational Church

September 29, 2024: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**~

“Lord, hear our Prayers...”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: James 5 v 13 - 20

I. Introduction:

To pray about something in our lives is such a personal matter. We bring our concerns to God, which we would not always discuss with others. We all pray differently, and prayer itself can take different forms. At times we come before God in a calm manner. At other times, we may be anxious about our situation, and then there are times we don't have words, just tears, because the situation is too difficult to resolve. As people of faith, we learn from a young age how to pray, but as we grow older, it seems harder to remain faithful to it as we pray and keep the faith that things will change. We may be pondering too much about the issue, rather than resting in faith that God is with us, and that God hears our prayers, and that God works things out according to God's will and God's way. Our task is to pray and wait for God to appear as we keep our faith in God.

II. Lord, hear our prayers:

James addressed his epistle to Jewish Christians who were dispersed across the Roman Empire. They were persecuted, and were suffering tremendously, both physically and spiritually, and needed encouragement. They lived in poverty, they were oppressed by the rich, and they were sick. He also addressed those who have sinned, and suggested they may be sick because of their sins, and are encouraging them to confess their sins. From verse 13 – 18, he speaks about prayer in every verse. They should pray when they are in trouble; when they are sick, they must call the elders of the congregation to pray over them and anoint them with oil; and when they have sinned, the congregation must pray with them, so that they can be healed. The way he instructed them to pray was an encouragement to them to be connected through prayer. Prayer is the way for them to cope with their pain

and suffering together. He encourages the elders and the congregation to come together and confess their sins and pray for one another to be healed.

This passage in James appears to be a necessity for the churches to follow. Is one of you in trouble, he/she should pray; Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone of you sick? Call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil. He speaks to them in a matter-of-fact way, knowing that this prescription will be the “antidote for suffering”, as John MacArthur describes it in his commentary on James. Clinton Arnold (Ed) in The Zondervan Commentary on James, describes the prayerful life as follows, “Prayer is not passive, but a revolutionary act in a situation of struggle.” These Christians must continually speak to God about their situation, and not give up, and when things are good, they must sing praises to God. They did not know how God would intervene, but accepted James’ counsel not to be dismayed, but to pray in every situation.

III. Conclusion:

James suggests that the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well, and the Lord will raise him up. He instructed the elders to go and pray over the sick. The elders were those qualified older men who collectively helped to take care of the congregation. We know that Jesus healed the sick, and then instructed the disciples who became the apostles to do the same. As the early church developed and grew, it also changed structurally, and everyone was blessed with different gifts. They all were to pray for one another, but in this text, the elders would be the ones to pray over them and anoint them with oil. Not all churches nowadays have elders in the capacity to support the congregation during their times of difficulties and ailments. Often, our church members engage in different roles in their committees, and some would pray and support those in need.

We all know that when we are sick, and when we suffer from some ailment or problem in our lives, that it is not always easy to focus consistently on prayer, as James suggests we should. We may have our medications, and doctors’ visits, and then we hope and pray that things will get better. We also sometimes struggle to know when and how God will intervene in our situations. It is not always that straightforward in our minds. Clinton Arnold argues that one way to look at prayer for healing is as follows, "Somewhere in our prayers we must find a balance between

never expecting God to heal and requiring God to heal on demand. Trying to identify an exact definition of the “prayer of faith” is perplexing, but perhaps the best explanation appears already in 1:5–8, where we are instructed to pray “with the confident expectation that God will hear and answer the prayer.””

God is mysterious, and the work of God is mysterious. But we know that we can bring all our cares to God and that God listens to us, and God acts. We also know that we must pray without ceasing, and in community for the hand of God to move. We must pray seriously when things are going wrong, and we must pray intentionally together for the situation to change. God is with us always, but especially when we are in need, and God listens when we pray, and God’s answer comes when we pray. It does not always look the way we desire it to look, but God answers our prayers. May God help us and strengthen us in our prayer life. May God teach us how to pray and give us wisdom when we pray for others. In all of this, we are blessed by the One who cares deeply about our lives. Amen!