

St James, sermon series, 21/10/18.

Psalm 5, St James 5: 13-19, Matthew 6, 5-15.

Prayer and Healing

If you've had a look at our parish website you may have noticed that included in the few words below my 'photo I've said that I have a particular interest in the church's ministry of healing and wholeness. This isn't because I've witnessed major healings, but I do recall one occasion in the past when I used to attend a Pentecostal Church; there was a woman who was in a wheelchair, she couldn't walk for some reason and I met her one day at the shops and there she was walking.

She told me that she'd been to a healing service at a church and had a miraculous healing. She said "I can't stop buying shoes"! Well, I thought, something must have happened. Like most people I can be very

sceptical when it comes to expecting or seeing miraculous happenings.

In spite of all that I believe strongly in the power of prayer. In the reading we had from St James' epistle it tells us 'The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective'. I can say I've experienced that. Once at a Morning Prayer meeting there was a young woman present. She was from India and her husband had come to the Midlands to take up a new job. At home, in India, she went to what she called 'the poor church' and she delighted in the Christian faith. The problem for her was that her husband and wider family were all followers of a different faith and that made life difficult for her. After the service we were talking and I told her that I was going to have an operation the next day, I didn't say how anxious I was or that I was quite scared. She offered to pray for me and got down on her knees there and then and prayed. As I walked home I found that all my anxiety had

disappeared and I felt nothing but joy. Well, the prayer of the righteous, as St James says, is powerful. We can never underestimate its value.

But how do we pray. It may be that you find it easy to pray. But many find it very difficult. It's amazing how we can do all sorts of things in a day but when it comes to prayer a feeling of exhaustion may come over us. I for one find that it is very hard work. It seems to be much easier when we're praying with others than praying alone.

But prayer is first and foremost about relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It's likely to have elements of praise, worship, reverence, repentance, gratitude, silence and listening. All these things... and we can add to that list of the work of prayer: intercessions, petition and supplication. It is indeed hard work. St Paul in his letter to the Colossians tells them that a man named

Epaphras constantly 'wrestles' with God in prayer for them, it is labour, struggle and strain often accompanied by tears. But this must not put us off because it results in, at the very least, a sense of being refreshed and safe in the knowledge that we have brought our thanks, our cares and worries and our greatest fears right to the mercy seat of God and of course we always do so in the name of Jesus.

There's a beautiful hymn called 'Give to the winds thy fears'. One verse says: 'God hears your sighs and counts your tears, God will lift up your head'. The inspiration for the hymn comes from the words of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 41, verse 10: 'Fear not for I am with you'.

It's a blessing to have help and support from those who love us but there are times when only God can help. This was, I'm sure, how King David felt when, as we heard from Psalm 25, he called on God to

deliver him from his many afflictions. But early in the psalm he says, 'O my God, in you I trust'. Praying is very much about trust. What's the point of praying if we do not have any trust in God's power to hear and answer our prayer? Of course we know that even our most fervent prayers in extreme situations often don't get us what we want... but maybe God gives us what we need.

As Jesus speaks to his disciples he gives them some advice on how they should pray. It's not about showing how pious we are or how godly. It's about sincerity of heart. It's not about praying for its own sake but coming before God in genuine humility. It's about preparing ourselves, also, and that means removing bitterness towards others from our hearts, about being aware of how God has loved and forgiven us and about us in our turn forgiving others. The Lord's Prayer, then, apart from helping us to seek what we need to get through the day, also reminds us

of our duty towards our neighbour. Prayer and healing...it's certain that we don't know the mind of God, but we can take up our weapon of prayer. First and foremost we need to remember that God created us and loves us and will surely hear us and answer us, in His own way, through Christ who died for us if we can only trust in his loving kindness.

Amen.