

“Blest be the Tie...”
Rev. Susan M. Prichard
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James 5:13-20

The letter of James is a late, first century letter written in the form of a sermon. James is writing to the faithful to encourage them through the trials they were all enduring.

James 5: 13-20

On this World Communion Sunday, we, like other Christians around the world, are celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is one of the symbols that unites us, no matter our nationality, race, language or culture. In this day and age where we so often look for the things that divide us—World Communion Day—and the sacrament itself, reminds us that we are not alone. We do not live in isolation. We are not an end in and of ourselves. We are one faith community among many. Different and unique, and yet we are united with others in our common devotion to God and to his son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This passage from James reminds us of our responsibility as part of that greater body. We are not wandering about alone, we are connected and a vital part of the whole people of God.

Some of the time, we are tempted to think of our connectedness to one another and to the whole of the church in theoretical terms. And, in theory—in the abstract, we can embrace all the members of this faith community and the members of the greater church. But, today’s passage from James has nothing to do with theory—we’re back in the concrete. Today’s passage has everything to do with actual, day-to-day living with and being responsible for, each other. There’s no wiggle room. Here’s no place for misunderstanding. We are part of one another.

Suffering and cheer, illness and health, sin and forgiveness are part and parcel of our life together. While there may, indeed, be a social aspect to a faith community, there is primarily a sacramental responsibility to lift up one another to restore health, to overcome sin, and to serve God. The health and sin may be of an individual, but I think James also means of the community itself. We are not only responsible for the health and healing of individual members of our community, but as individual members, we are responsible for the health and well-being of the community as a whole.

We do a good job, I believe, in caring for most of the individuals. We usually have a long prayer list because we do feel a responsibility to lift up our extended community in prayer. This church has great lay visitors. But we can always use more. Many members of this congregation do many acts of kindness and deeds of service of which we are rarely aware unless we are the direct recipients of their care.

Are there individuals that don't get visited or individuals for whom we are not actively praying? Yes, I'm sure there are. But some of the responsibility for their omission comes from them. Some people don't want church visitors or their name mentioned during worship for whatever reason they may have; and others have never let us know that they are sick or in need. I think James added the part about the need to inform the elders of the church (for us that means the Deacons) because neither the deacons nor the pastor of the church are clairvoyant. We don't always know what's going on in someone's life—who's in the hospital, who's had an accident, or who's family is in need. We all have a responsibility to ask for help or prayers when they're needed.

James says we all have a responsibility to speak the truth—not to hurt, but only to heal. We all can drift from the truth. By truth I mean God's truth, God's way, not our various versions of what truth is. James says we need to remind one another of the truth. When we see someone straying from the truth, we have a responsibility to try to bring that someone back. I think we need to do this—but we need to do this only after extensive prayer for guidance. We need to be sure that we are coming from a place of love and that there is no plank in our eye before we mention the splinter in another's.

As a faith community we are also capable of straying from the truth—from the path that God has chosen for us. But each time we have a day like today—where we reaffirm our covenant with God and one another—individually and corporately, we self correct toward that goal. But between these special Sundays, we need prophets and truth tellers to continually remind us of our common truth—our common purpose in serving God.

As we approach this table, let us remember that this table belongs to Christ—not to us. This table is open to all who want to be in covenant with Christ and Christ's greater community. We come to the table as individuals, conscious of our individual commitment and responsibility before God. We come to be refreshed and renewed. We come to be restored and made whole. We come to make the declaration that we are dependent on and committed to furthering our relationship to God. We come in gratitude and thanksgiving for all the gifts God has given us.

As a faith community we come to this table in solidarity. We acknowledge that we are part of the wider church and part of the wider family of God's children. We come as one body with many diverse members; one family with many diverse opinions; yet one church united in serving God and God's people.

May God bless us in our eating and drinking; in our serving and being served; in our giving and our receiving; in the ties that bind us heart and hand, together, in God's love.