

Praying in the Name of Jesus  
Sermon for the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
James 5:13-17



Today, I want to start by reading a statement from an ill person about being sick: "I feel like I'm trapped in a cave where there is no longer a way out. The pain is so strong that I can't think about anything else, even if I wanted to. The illness has scratched out all plans for the future. I have no future anymore and there is no one to whom I can say that. I am alone with my melancholy, disappointment, and weakness."

Unless we die suddenly, all people, at some point, will experience such deep despair as described above. How do we deal with this? When I see the flood of ads that promise health and healing, I notice that most people want to avoid illness at all costs. We all dream about being completely healthy and happy one day. We dream about experiencing all the love and fulfillment at work and in the family, and we want to finally see peace in our world. But the holistic healing in this sense is and remains an illusion. The numerous healing methods are mere mirages that want to fool us into believing what we can never have in reality. All healing methods, whatever they may be called, remain only selective. The fact is people will never be completely healthy and will always get sick.

But what do we do when we get sick? To answer that, I will now read the sermon text for this Sunday from James 5:13-16. *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

James wants to take us by the hand and free us from the many caves in which we have entrenched ourselves. To do this, the first thing he does is to show us that we don't have to be alone, but that we should pray for one another. It is a mistake to assume that we must carry the hardest things in life by ourselves and unfortunately, that is often the reality. Perhaps it's because we fundamentally have difficulty dealing with illness. Illness is often treated in the consulting rooms of medical specialists and this private space is strictly guarded. In this way, the person is alone and can no longer imagine sharing his worries with his Christian brothers and sisters. Perhaps behind this reservedness about suffering lies a fundamental problem: our inability to accept weakness. We always strive to be stronger, more beautiful, and more intelligent. However, when someone is faced with challenges, we find it difficult to deal with them appropriately and express our compassion with regret at best. We therefore banish those who get sick or become older to loneliness and even deprive them of their last dignity. The problem with such behavior is that we not only have a fundamental difficulty with weakness, but we also can't talk about the reason for our weakness. Indeed, behind our weakness is our fundamental fallibility and frailty resulting from sin. We all share this fate with one another. What we either still haven't understood or maybe keep forgetting is that we don't have to be afraid about such things at all. This is because Jesus Christ wasn't ashamed of such things for Jesus Himself embraced the sick and the weak especially. He regularly sought them, made time for them, and healed them.

Jesus passed His mission to the weak and sick on to the first church. Therefore, we can put a big heading on this text that we read from the Epistle of James as: "Praying in the Name of Jesus." Anointing someone with oil is just an outward expression. What's important is to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. It's also no miracle then, when the first church prays in the name of Jesus, they do it knowing that the Lord Jesus is present in their midst. It isn't the congregation or the pastor at work, but Jesus Himself. In the Lutheran

church, this physical presence of our Lord Jesus is especially emphasized. The Smalcdald articles of our Lutheran faith establish that Christ Himself is physically present through the Gospel, Baptism, and Holy Communion. It's interesting that these Smalcdald articles so closely link the outreach of the church that the congregation does with this physical presence of Jesus. When the congregation prays for one another, they don't do so of their own strength, but by the command and promise of the Lord Jesus Himself. Praying in the name of our Lord Jesus is therefore a promise and command of the church.

It should not be that people remain alone in their illness. It should not be that people chase after all possible healing methods, whether established or questionable. There is a way out of the cave of loneliness. There is a way out of melancholy. There is a way out of the darkness of the cave into the light. Even when the illness can't be cured, there is a way. And Christ is this way. In our church, we have the crucified Jesus on the altar. Jesus showed His solidarity with the sinners and the weak through the cross. Jesus wasn't ashamed of our sins and weakness, but He took them upon His own body. By this, Jesus wants to show us who we are in reality. We are not those who want to make colorful advertising leaflets out of ourselves, but we are where the Crucified One is: miserable and needy people who need salvation. Even we Christians are not holier, better, or more principled. Instead, we must constantly await strength, help, and healing from Jesus. In this respect, we also open our hearts to all others who are in need: the sick, the addicted, the elderly. They are all especially loved, wanted, and accepted by God.

James' epistle wants to break this ice and directly tells us: is someone sick, then he should call the elders of the congregation and ask them to pray. We don't need to be ashamed to call up our fellow believers and say: "Pray for me!" Jesus went in search of people in their numerous caves, now He sends His followers and regularly instructs us to do the same. What an opportunity! We can do what the four friends did who lowered their sick friend through the roof to place him at the feet of Jesus. Jesus promises us that He is a holistic healer who heals us both physically and spiritually. The name of Jesus, "Yeshua," already means what He is: "Savior" or one can also say, "holistic healer." He came to heal us not only from our individual ailments, but basically to save the whole person. He wants the best for us in our earthly life and in eternal life afterwards, He wants us to draw from the infinite fullness of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us this. His cross is the place at which He took all pain, sin, and weakness onto Himself.

From our text in James, it is exceedingly clear the importance Jesus and the church had for the Christians at that time. The church has this importance still. The church is a place in which we can talk about our pain, where we can pray about our illnesses, a place where we may cry, a place where we can pour out all of our needs and distress before God and other people can carry our distress before God in the name of Jesus. We can also lay all of our sins before the judgment seat of God in the name of Jesus and breathe freely. But the very best and most beautiful thing that Jesus gives us is that He truly heals us completely. That is exactly what the advertisements for holistic healing can't offer.

What makes Jesus' healing so special is that He not only cares about our everyday worries, but He places our feet on the edge of eternity and shows us that He actually wants to make us healthy forever. Already in this life, we can see, taste, and feel God's eternity shining into our lives. When the sick, elderly, and the sad met Jesus, their eyes didn't light up just because Jesus had taken away their illness and old age for a moment. No, their hearts became light and joyful because they saw the chains of sin, death, and the devil fall away, and they became free forever. This is exactly why Christians may always be joyful in the face of human experience. That's why very old people and those who face death can dance joyfully in their hearts. They are allowed to be light and joyful in their hearts, not because they have become physically healthy, but because their eyes open and they can see that God loves them, that God has even taken them especially into His heart and is close to them. Amen.