

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, July 26, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 13; James 5: 13-20

Sermon: Prayer of Faith

A woman by the name of Shelly Chapin wrote these words in a devotional book entitled *Rhythms of the Heart*. “ The word cancer was a total surprise to me. I was 28 years old at the time and totally unprepared for that kind of news. And the type of cancer I have is rare.. Needless to say, suffering has played its tune in my life since my first introduction to cancer.

Though people have tried to offer help through the years, I have found that most believers do not feel comfortable with the unknown. Instead of offering a kind word, a gentle touch, or a listening ear, they offer advice on how to cure the problem so that all can be ‘OK’ again.

We are rarely prepared for suffering, and almost never prepared for the reality that suffering can happen to ‘me’.

I’m not sure why it is so difficult for Christians to bear pain. Jesus was honest with us about the trials we would experience, and He certainly lived a life in which suffering was a regular occurrence.

In fact, those who have known God through the years have experienced great losses. I am reminded of Job-a man who knew God only to lose all that he had worked for...

I think one of the most important gifts Job gave to believers was his attitude. He openly grieved. He openly questioned. He openly despaired, even of life. And yet he also held on to the One who had always been faithful.

It says in Job 42:5 ‘My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You.’ Such humility from a man whose body and soul were in torment. Job had learned an important lesson. He had been given eyes to see eternity even through his pain. And such a gift can hardly be despised.

I fully recognize how hard it is for us to bear our sufferings. No one likes to suffer grief, but our God is not absent in our pain, nor does He waste our experiences.

I am still learning to see God in the presence of my own pain, and I pray that He grants you the grace to see him in your difficulties too.”

These are powerful words from a Christian woman that is dealing with her pain, not only physically but also emotionally, and spiritually. And like Job she sees God clearer now.

When we are suffering in our lives we are always dealing with a lot of emotions. It can seem overwhelming at times. There are places where we just feel empty and wounded and there are times when we just want to lament to God as Job did and be honest with our feelings and emotions before God. God can take it, because God knows us inside and out, Psalm 13 that we read for our Old Testament lesson is known as a Lament Psalm. There are about 45 Lament Psalms. Lament Psalms are prayers for God’s deliverance, for comfort in times of desperation and despair. It is a cry to God in which the person is writing about their human experience. The Psalm usually has three different dimensions: It is directed toward God, an accusation or complaint against God, toward other people, a complaint against an enemy, and toward the lamenter or writer himself, using the “I” language.

We can see from the beginning of the Psalm that the person is longing for the Lord’s deliverance.

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long shall I take counsel in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long will my enemy be exalted over me?”

There is great pain felt in this Psalm and many Psalms like this. Many people turn to the Psalms when they are suffering to know that another knows the pain of their heart—the depth of the wounds.

It helps us during times of difficulty to turn to God and to someone that knows what we are going through because they have been there.

God knows the depth of our pain and God knows the wounds that we experience in this life. Psalm 13 begins by crying out for deliverance but by the end the Psalm says, “But I have trusted in Your mercy, My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

It ends with hope in the mercy of the Lord and in God’s gift of salvation no matter what sufferings we face in this life. It is important to know and to trust that God is with us in the midst of our suffering and in the midst of the times of trial and prayer must play a vital part in all of this.

Through prayer we acknowledge our inability to be wise on our own. We need God at all times in our life. God is the one that heals our wounds and strengthens our hearts. God is our great physician.

In this last passage of scripture that we are looking at in James Chapter 5, James ends his letter with the same emphasis as he began it—with PRAYER.

In chapter 1 James commands his readers to “Pray for Wisdom” and now closing the letter he turns to wisdom for praying. Wisdom means depending on God in every circumstance.

There are four characteristics of prayer that James points out.

1. Prayer is always appropriate- no circumstance puts us out of reach with God.
2. Prayer is often corporate- other members of Christ’s body can share the experience with us.
3. Prayer is totally subject to God’s will- we must trust him for guidance in how to pray.
4. Prayer can be an encouragement— the best way to reach others.

We can pray in all seasons of life. Nothing in our life is secret to God. We always have the right to pray, and we always have a need to pray.

James knew that there were times in which we needed others in the body of Christ to pray with us and for us. Many times we need healing of painful memories from our past in which we have anger or bitterness towards someone. Or an unresolved situation with someone that has left us wounded. We need Jesus’ healing touch.

James writes: "Is any 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; and the prayer of faith will save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

In our difficult days we need to know that others are praying for us, and their support and love can bring healing to us in other ways than physically. We need to pray for the needs of others and God will hear the prayers of the faithful.

Prayer is often corporate, and it is an expression of our love for each other and our love and service of God.

When one member of the body suffers we all suffer, when one rejoices we all rejoice. When one member is lamenting to God we are to pray with them and be with them until they can rejoice in the salvation of the Lord.

James' words are carefully chosen. He wanted to give full encouragement about the Power of Prayer, yet he didn't want to make it magical or automatic. It was important for him to make clear that prayer is totally subject to God's will. We cannot manipulate God.

The oil of anointing itself has no power. It is a sign of dependence on God. It goes back to the Old Testament ritual of anoint in which priests, kings and prophets were anointed and were filled with the Holy Spirit in order to serve God.

The Name of the Lord is called upon in prayer. We ask in the Name of Jesus because Jesus has become for us the way. Our prayer and anointing has significance only because of him.

Healing can mean having peace and joy and wholeness that comes from God's love, mercy and forgiveness.

God can transform troubles into triumphs!

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12, "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Remember James has been teaching his readers about being mature spiritually. The mature Christian knows how to sing and give praises to God while he is suffering. Anyone can sing after the trouble has passed, but God is able to give us a song even in the darkest of nights.

In Acts 16: 25 Paul and Silas were suffering in the Philippian jail and at midnight they prayed and sang praises to God.

God never promised us adversity-free living. Every Christian goes through something at some point in their life.

Christians will experience tough times financially. We will suffer loss. We will not all “get well.” We will not all be “delivered” from our problems, but we can show others the power of God through our lives. We can prove that God is faithful, and His word is true, by how God works in our lives.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was “filled with compassion” signifying his deep identification with our pain and suffering.

On the cross Jesus fully identified with our humanity and took upon himself the entire range of our feelings and emotions and physical pain. He bore the feeling of our infirmities, that we would not have to bear them.

Joni Eareckson, who became a quadriplegic when she was 16 years old. She hit a rock while diving into a lake. A friend once said to her, “Joni, Jesus knows how you feel. You’re not the only one who’s been paralyzed. He was paralyzed too. He was nailed to the cross. His back was raw from beatings like your back sometimes gets raw. Oh, he must have longed to move. To change His position, to redistribute His weight somehow, but he couldn’t move. Joni, Jesus knows how you feel.”

Jesus’ every word and action reflect to us the heart, will and character of God. And what Jesus reveals to us is that the central loving purpose of God is to bring salvation, healing and wholeness to his people.

Today may our faithful response to Jesus enable his saving, healing love and power to flow to us and through us.

And may we be able to say in our times of suffering and difficulty:

“I have trusted in your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord; because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

Wait upon the Lord for all your needs and take them all to the Lord in prayer.

During the singing of the hymn please come forward if you would like anointing today. Remember God knows your heart and our Great Physician can touch you and bring you peace and wholeness.