

October 1, 2006
Year B, Proper 21
St. Michael Lutheran Church
Rev. John Wertz, Jr.
James 5:13-20

I learned a few things

- during my nearly 7 years in Walterboro, South Carolina
 - and one of the lessons I learned
 - was simply
 - Good tools make a job easier.
- We had been living in the parsonage
 - for about 2 months
 - when the church decided that we needed to remove a tree in the backyard
- Some discussion took place
 - and they decided that the tree would be removed
 - the following Saturday.
- Now please understand -
 - this was not some little bitty tree
 - this tree was by my recollection over 20 feet tall
 - and it was less than 20 feet from the house
 - in addition to that
 - the backyard was surrounded by a chain-link fence.
- Now having lived in cities most of my life
 - the only thing I knew about removing trees was what I had seen on TV,

- so I didn't know what to expect that Saturday morning
 - but nevertheless what happened surprised me
 - for John
 - who happened to own a heavy equipment dealership
 - showed up with a backhoe
 - and another man's son
 - who worked for a tree service
 - showed up with his truck
 - and the group got to work.
 - over the course of the morning,
 - using these amazing tools
 - they removed the fence
 - took down the tree
 - turned it into wood chips
 - and replaced the fence
- Now, without the backhoe
 - taking down the fence alone would have taken all morning
 - but with these tools at their disposal
 - and people who really knew how to use the tools well
 - the job was done quickly and effectively
- Having the right tools
 - and knowing how to use those tools
 - makes a big difference

- it makes a big difference
 - if you are taking down a tree
 - and it makes a big difference if you are trying to live a life of faith
- You see
 - over the last several months
 - I've become convinced
 - that a large part of our calling as a congregation
 - is to equip people with the tools they need
 - to live whole, healthy lives of faith
 - and by equip
 - I mean not just say
 - try this or read that,
 - but really to provide both the tools for a life of faith
 - and the instruction necessary to use those tools
- in many ways,
 - I think that's what James does in this letter we've been reading.
 - James takes a look at the life of faith
 - and offers some tips and instructions for how to live faithfully
 - James calls us to place God at the center of our lives
 - and to let our actions and our lives reflect the love God has shown us
 - James calls us to use a language of faithfulness when we speak
 - and to submit to God's guidance, resist sin and draw near to God
- And now

- as this letter draws to a close
 - James focuses on prayer
 - for James knows that prayer
 - is an essential tool for our life of faith
 - “The prayer,”
 - James says
 - “of the righteous is powerful and effective.” (*James 5:16*)
 - Prayer is the place where we talk to
 - and listen to God
 - Prayer is the way
 - that we share our concerns with God
 - and open ourselves to God’s guidance
- Prayer, conversation with God,
- is one important way
 - that our relationship with God is strengthened.
 - But like any tool,
 - if you don’t know how to use it - -
 - it’s not as helpful as it could be.
 - for example
 - when my father moved to Miami
 - I ended up with a number of his tools
 - including a small table mounted saw he’d never used
 - I took the tool out of the box,

- I know how to turn it on,
 - I have it on my work bench,
 - and I feel sure it could be used to make some beautiful things,
 - but I've never taken the time to learn how to use it properly
 - and so beyond making a few simple cuts
 - the potential value of the tool is untapped. - -
- Now please understand,
 - I don't mean to say that prayer is so complicated
 - that it requires an extensive instructional manual
- In fact -
 - in many ways prayer is one of the simplest aspects of a life of faith
 - for a prayer can be as simple as
 - "Lord, help me!"
 - you don't need flowery words
 - or complicated setups to pray - -
 - simply start talking to God
 - and listening to God
 - and you are praying
- No - -
 - I'm simply saying that
 - prayer is a tool that can be used in many ways
 - and the more we learn about prayer
 - the more styles and types of prayer we learn

- the more we practice prayer
- well - the more
- prayer helps us to experience God's presence
- in our lives
- It's like that saw on my work bench
 - just because I know how to turn it on
 - doesn't mean I know all the ways the saw can be used - -
 - but if I were to take the time to learn about the tool,
 - if I take time to practice what I've learned,
 - who knows I may someday use that tool
 - in ways I can't even imagined today
- That was the idea behind the WORDshop on Prayer I taught a few weeks ago
 - to give people the chance to think about prayer
 - and expand their understand of the ways we can pray
 - now one of the things we did was discuss four possibilities to expand your prayer life
 - that I found in a book entitled
 - “Real Faith for Real Life”
 - by Pastor Mike Foss
 - those four are
 - Daily Prayer
 - finding your best time of day
 - and offering a prayer each day at that time
 - Continuous prayer

- trying to live your whole day as a conversation with God
- Persistent Prayer
 - being open to pray for someone or something
 - when that name or idea
 - keeps popping into your mind
- and the Lord's Prayer
 - specifically using the Lord's Prayer
 - as a focus for your personal prayer

Each of these four

- is a possibility you might try to grow your prayer life - -
- You don't need to practice all of them
 - you don't **have to** practice any of them
 - but these prayer forms or patterns
 - have been helpful to other Christians in their prayer lives
 - and so I shared them as an example
 - of expanding your prayer life in new directions
- the main point of that WORDshop
 - and I think the main point of what James is saying
 - is simply - -

PRAY!

- For prayer
 - is powerful!
 - and prayer is effective!

- Now just like most of the tools that I have,
 - I don't claim to fully understand
 - how prayer works
 - or why sometimes it seems like
 - some prayers are answered and others are not answered
 - in the way that we want them answered,
- But I know from my own experience
 - and from the experience of countless other Christians
 - that prayer makes a difference
- whether it is prayer
 - asking for help for someone else
 - or a prayer of confession asking for forgiveness
 - or a prayer out of confusion
 - looking for guidance
 - or a prayer of desperation
 - looking for help for yourself
- Prayer makes a difference
 - for through prayer we are connected to the good news of God's love for us
 - and we can experience
 - the hope,
 - and guidance
 - and help
 - that comes to us when we talk to

- and listen to God.

So - - Pray -

- Pray when things are good.

- Pray when things are bad.

- but simply pray, for it is through prayer

- that we can experience God's power and presence

- in our lives most clearly.