*O God, who hast made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after thee and find thee; bring the nations into thy fold; pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of thy kingdom; in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good Morning!

This morning concludes our all-to-brief time with St. James' letter. Over the past few weeks, James has warned us about the dangers of an unbridled tongue, encouraged to engage in godly hospitality in our avoidance of partiality, admonished us to refrain from grumbling (a theme which our lesson from Numbers readdresses today), and has encouraged us as his readers to pursue the wisdom of faithfulness to God's desire for us as His children. And week by week, I can feel the seat beneath me creaking as I squirm, reminded once again how much more work God has to do in me as I seek towards that wisdom that James so fervently wrote about all those years ago.

As a piece, James reads as strong medicine for the affliction of our unrighteousness. When I read through it, I often think of that weird gasp you make when you have to drink cough medicine. It can feel stark and, as I said the other day, kind of bracing. It's interesting then, that after such bold instruction across the letter, that James concludes his text by reminding us that all of what he recommends is meant for the context of ministry, for life in the Church. We know this because his last word to us today is a word of encouragement, a practical application of how we can actively address real pastoral concerns among real people in real communities. I love that in the end, James is concerned with prayer, with healing, with the reconciliation between God and humanity on offer in Christ's body.

I think that if James is so willing to end his letter with such dear direction for the afflicted to pray and the joyful to praise means that the act of our lifting our voices to God in prayer and praise are among the most profound acts that we can offer. Today, James does not allow us to consider whether or not prayer "works," but rather triples down on the idea that prayer is a vital function of a living and breathing faith, or trust, that God is indeed at work among His people. We pray for the sick, because we trust that God cares for the sick and cares for those who are concerned for the sick. We ask our elders, in our case our ordained clergy, to anoint with oil because we trust that God will keep the promise of the sacrament of unction. We confess our sins because we trust that God will forgive them in the person and work of Christ. Even as the text of this lesson ends, in the concern that James would have us show for the wayward of the faith, we find trust that the lost and wayward still have a place in the community of Christ's bride.

If James has been spurring us on towards Christian wisdom, I think the capstone of his project is found in today's invitation to prayer, praise, and pastoral care. I think these are the most basic ways we show our wisdom in Christ, and all other aspects of Christian life start from these foundational elements, prayer especially. In my own life and ministry, I realize that of the work I'm given to do is probably very poorly done if I haven't prayed. As a pastor, I think I'd be liable if a people, perhaps a parish, were to head off into life and ministry without the invitation to a robust life of prayer. So, I think this morning I'll offer some pointers on prayer perhaps as an attempt to remove a millstone from my neck and help us remain salty, as Jesus commends, seasoned with grace for what life has in store for us in our work together.

First, a plug for the daily office. Of course, we offer the daily office here at the parish on weekdays at 8:30am and 5:30pm. The Daily Office is part of the entire Church's long history of daily liturgical prayer that actually predates Pentecost. For lots of folks (myself included), that rootedness in the long history of the Church's cycle of prayer is extremely comforting. But to be perfectly honest, I really need the daily discipline of prayer because I know that without it, I won't do it. Plus, I find it extremely helpful to be in a place that helps to lift my spirit to prayer and the chancel of Saint John's is absolutely one of those places for me. That seat right there, is one of my favorite places in the entire world because there I know I can lift my voice to God and even receive his comfort for my own afflictions, even the affliction of my sin. So, if you're interested in Morning and Evening Prayer, know that you have access to them by many means, especially your prayer books. You can offer the office at home or anywhere and even when you pray them in solitary fashion, you are never truly alone as your prayers are offered in concert with the communion of the saints.

Next, I'd like to give you a quick little formula if you have trouble praying extemporaneously. I have always had trouble with that, and I am so grateful for the prayer book tradition for helping me to find a voice for my prayers. But in working through the tradition, I've gotten more comfortable being able to pray 'on the spot' as it were and maybe this little trick can help you too. So, when you go to pray, remember three steps: address, ask, acclaim. My liturgy nerd friends are going to send me mean emails, but I think this is a helpful way to remember the process. So again, when we pray: address, ask, acclaim. Begin each prayer by addressing the person to whom you mean to pray. "O God" is a great place to start. Sometimes you can even add something nice about God after you address Him. Like:

"O God, you are really, really good." It doesn't have to be erudite to be efficacious. Then, after you address, ask. Say, like James assumes, there's someone sick or in trouble around you. Ask God to work His healing in them. So, let's try that together with our address. It sounds like this: "O God, you are really, really good. I pray that you would heal my sick friend." Simple right? Now let's finish it with an acclamation. Here's where we can add some more praise, or even just say that we understand that God lives in Heaven or how he is known to us. So, let's put together our little prayer for our sick friend: "O God, you are really really good. I pray that you would heal my sick friend. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen. There are other ways to articulate that little formula, but I hope that helps. Remember: address, ask, acclaim. And Amen begins with A too so don't forget that I guess.

As I close, I suppose I'd add a warning about prayer. I think prayer is healthiest if we actually do the work of addressing God in Christ. Many times, people will say that certain acts, certain activities are the way they pray. Many times, they are very worthy endeavors. Many other times, they are just enjoyable. But even the worthiest of endeavor, even the best use of our time can have just a moment set aside to ask God's blessing, ask His help, or give Him thanks. When we pray like this, I think it opens our hearts to the fact that Christ has offered himself for the life of the world, and that our lives are meant to be part of that same offering.

At any rate, I hope you know that you are always in my prayers. I hope that you would keep one another in your prayers as well. My greatest hope for this parish is that it be known as a house of prayer, and that the people who dwell therein would be known as a people who pray.

To the Living God be all glory, from age to age, Amen.