

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA October 14, 2012

James 5:13-18

How Calloused are Your Knees?

1. *Two Attitudes toward Prayer*
2. *We can be People of Prayer, just like James!*

Hymns: 232 – 412 –
409 -- 408

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James 5:13-18

“Old Camel Knees.” At first hearing, it doesn’t seem to be the most flattering of nicknames, does it? Yet, “Camel Knees” that was the nickname that was given to James, the brother of Jesus who wrote the words which we have been focusing on for the past four Sundays. And despite how it might sound, that nickname was given to him in the most respectful and admiring of ways by his peers in the early Christian church who witnessed his life.

So why camel knees? As a pack animal which spent all of its days trudging through the sands of the ancient Middle East, a camel’s knees took a beating. The constant up and down to load and unload led to knees that were gnarled, beat up and calloused. For this Christian leader named James, it was a life spent

kneeling in prayer that led to calloused and beat up knees. Amongst his cohorts, James was known as a man of prayer. As he led the Christian church in Jerusalem, as he battled against many who tried to tear Christ down, James’ frequent answer was prayer.

As we finish our look at the words of the man who encourages us to have a faith that works, we want to consider today what was so important to James, namely, prayer. As we look at James’ attitude toward prayer, we must also look at our own attitudes toward prayer. And there is an easy way to judge how we put prayer into practice in our lives. Simply look down, and judge for yourself: “How calloused are your knees?”

Now of course, prayers do not need to be offered on your knees to make them valid, but the point remains. For many, many Christian people, myself sadly included, prayer is simply something that we don’t spend enough time doing. And there are a variety of different reasons why that might be the case.

For some, it might be easy to view prayer as nothing more than the emergency line. It is when all other solutions have been tried and there is nothing left that we ourselves can do, that we finally go to God asking for help. It is when the diagnosis is the dimmest and the outlooks are the bleakest that we finally inform others that we could really use their prayers. For many, prayer is seen as the last resort or the tool that is used only in really hard times.

Others of us might wonder whether prayer really has any power. After all, if God knows all things and God has control of all things, then what good can our prayer really affect? If we reason that prayer really doesn’t have much power, why would we spend much of our time in it? With that attitude, it is probably only guilt or habit that ever leads us to fold our hands in prayer.

Still others might believe in the power of prayer, but find that they don’t have time for it in their lives. As products of a society that believes that the fuller the calendar the better, are there times when you simply don’t have time to pray? Are there days when time spent talking to God simply can’t make it into the schedule?

Or perhaps we question whether God would really want to hear about everything that happens in our lives. Should we really bother to tell him about the small joys and the minor problems? Doesn’t he have better things to do and bigger problems to take care of?

Whether it be doubts about its effectiveness or viewing it as the last resort or struggling to find the time, we all have excuses for why we don’t spend more time in prayer. But the reality is much simpler; a lack of prayer life shows a lack of faith, because a working faith will use prayer as the powerful tool that it is. And as we think about our own attitudes, we see

something very different from James as he speaks about prayer. ***“Is any one of you in trouble, let him pray; is any one happy, let him sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church to pray over him...The prayer of the righteous man is powerful and effective.”***

James’ knees were calloused from time spent in prayer, because he saw every situation in life as a reason to go to God in prayer. While we often view it as the last line for help, James knew that it was the first and only place to turn. While we often view it as useless, James knew that prayer was powerful and effective. While we often struggle to find time, James simply prayed in every situation. Prayer was the priority in James’ life and it showed a faith that was working. He went to God with full confidence knowing that his prayers would be heard, and knowing that his prayers would be answered.

And as we strive to have faith that works, as we look to become people of prayer, we must first figure out what made James’ attitude so different than ours. But before we do that, we must remember why each and every Christian is able to pray.

Each Christian’s ability to pray comes through what Jesus has done for us. Sin has made it so that we have no confidence when we approach our holy God. The devil has made it so that we doubt whether prayer really has any power. The world has made it so that we feel like we don’t have any time for prayer. Our spiritual enemies try to keep us from God. But, Jesus has made it so that the line of communication between God and his people has been completely restored. Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, each Christian can confidently go to God as the loving Father and talk to him about anything that is happening in life. And we all have the same access to God our Father. As we can’t wait to tell those who are close to us about everything that happens in our lives, from good to bad, we can also go to our heavenly Father knowing that he cares about us and he truly wants to hear from us. Remembering that God sent Jesus into this world so that we could have access to the Father right now as well as for eternity will help us to treasure this gift that was won for us.

Being reminded of that thought, we can look at James’ prayer life and learn to be people of prayer just like him.

James learned to pray from Jesus, just like we can. As we look through the Gospels, we very often hear about Jesus spending time in prayer and teaching his disciples to pray. If we are searching for how to pray, we can go the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus asked for God’s help. There we see him boldly asking God to make things easier, but we also see him humbly submitting to God’s will. If we are struggling to find time to pray, we can look to the times when Jesus would take time to escape from the

crowds to pray. The one who gives us access to the Father also serves as an example.

James also looked for proof in Scriptures for the power of prayer, just like we can. In his letter, he points us to the Old Testament prophet Elijah, writing, ***“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”*** When we are doubting whether prayer can work, we can open up the Bible and look for the many places where God has answered his people’s prayers.

And looking to Christ for guidance and the Scriptures for proof, James prayed in faith, just like we can. James knew that through the blood of Jesus, he was a righteous man in God’s eyes and therefore he believed confidently that his prayers were powerful and effective. Through the blood of Jesus, we don’t have to have any doubts that we also are righteous people before God. Therefore, each of our prayers holds that same power. Each one of our prayers spoken to God will have an effect on God’s plans. What a thought that is to think about! When we speak to God, it has an effect as God works in this world.

When James considered the tremendous tool that was given to him in prayer, it is no surprise that he had calloused knees from time spent in prayer. As we take James message to heart, as we consider the tremendous tool that has been given to us, may we also wear out our knees as we humbly, yet confidently pray to our God.

As we close our time in James’ letter, words which speak so abundantly about a faith that works, let us not miss out on one of the easiest ways that we can put our faith into action. As James began his letter by urging Christians to make use of prayer, he also finishes his words with a plea to pray. May prayer also be the bookends of our days, the thing that we start each and every day with, and the way that we end each night. Let us go confidently to God, showing a working faith which keeps on praying in every situation. Amen.