

05.05.24 ~ Easter 6

“The Beauty of Two Ministry Gifts”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Exodus 17:12 (NIV)

¹² When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

James 5:13-15 (NIV)

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them 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 them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

Leader: These Are Important Reminders from God!

All: Thanks be to God!

2 Timothy 2:2; 3:16 (NIV)

² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness . . .

James 3:1 (NIV)

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Leader: These Words Too Are Important Reminders from God!

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Nurturing God, we thank you for the beautiful gifts you bestow on our nurses and teachers. Many of these talented people have influenced our lives both in and outside of the church setting. They give so much that they need your refreshment and fulfillment to continue sharing their gifts of care and instruction. As we listen to the Scriptures bring to mind ways we can acknowledge them and recognize their contributions to us and to society. Help us to respect and applaud their hard work and let them feel your presence daily. As you cared for and taught the early disciples and later apostles, we ask you to continue caring for us and teaching us your word so that we may share it with others. We still rejoice at the resurrection and you’re your spirit through these scriptures; may your voice be heard through this messenger. Amen.

Happy Nurses and Teachers Week! Even though most of us are no longer in school, and we are here, so not in need of a nurse, each year we try to recognize those among us or those who influenced us in the nursing and teaching professions during this first Sunday of May. So, thank you for your education and your sacrificial service over the years, those who currently serve, or those who are retired or in another role. We acknowledge not just educational institution teachers, but also our Sunday School/Bible Study teachers past and present and our Parish Nurses past and present. Thank you, again, for all you are, how you have served, and all you still do to sustain beauty, stretch our imaginations, and keep our physical and mental lives stable and healthy!

The first passages have more to do with caregiving and nurturing. In Exodus 17, the context is a battle between the Amalekites (descendants of Esau, who lost his birthright) and Moses. When Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed against the Amalekites, but when he lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed in battle. Right before this section, remember, Israel was wandering in the wilderness escaping Egypt, and the people were unhappy. The Lord heard their murmurings of having no food or water. They did have 40 years of manna until they reached the borders of Canaan. And they thirsted in their wilderness of sin until God instructed Moses to strike the rock to receive refreshing water. In our story, Moses' hands were heavy, and he needed sustenance to share the power of a war victory. The hand, in general, is a symbol or sign of power. Remember the staff Moses raised to bring about the Lord's punishments on Egypt or to part the Red Sea? A raised hand communicated divine power and God's assistance in the battle. In this case, even the all-powerful Moses

needed some help, so Aaron, his brother, and Hur, a leader, got a stone for him to sit on, and held up his weakening arms so they could win the battle over Amalek. These outstretched arms were a sign of Yahweh's power that could bring his people to victory.

In the James 5 passage, we are reminded that prayer is first for the afflicted. Let him pray and sing psalms; let elders anoint with oil in the name of the Lord. The oil was both symbolic of divine power to heal and seemingly curative, so it was the first medicine used for an illness. Its use was common in the ancient world, but not technically a cure. If you think about today's aromatherapy studies and results, it makes sense. A fragrant oil like lavender can relax the body naturally, allowing it to calm and work properly to heal; colicky babies respond well to soothing herbal fragrances. We know that chamomile soothes the tummy and helps one to sleep more peacefully.

Let us remember, however, that the first caregiver is God. God is the first great physician, and prayer has been universally effective throughout time. Prayer alone, however, is not advisable, because God equips men and women too with specific skills of caring, compassion, divine abilities, and proper instruction to heal others. The gift of "helps" or healing, depending on your Bible translation, is considered one of the many spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12. And in Mark 2:5 and John 9:2, Jesus heals men from what the world considered sin. They were delivered from blindness and paralysis, sicknesses thought to have been brought on by generational sin.

Not all sickness, of course, can be cured; that is why we say, "if it be God's will;" yet even that is not always helpful emotionally. Many

fringe outlier churches use that theology to teach falsely that if you are still sick after a time, then you must not be living according to God's will or forgiven. So, be careful **not** to say negative judgments over the sick! Seemingly well-intentioned words can get twisted by society to denigrate the power of prayer to heal. God gives us powers of human responsibility (to get to the doctor, for instance) as well as powers of divine intervention to help us heal. Suffering stirs the compassion of empathy within some people specifically gifted to serve those who suffer. The power of prayer can ease those who will not heal but are led to suffer; we call this palliative care, and those who serve in this area or are going through it deserve our thanks and God's blessings. The James passage reminds us to call on the elders for prayer in community; although our leaders are not called elders, I call on you to pray for our nurses.

We also know scientifically and intuitively that our mental status makes a difference in healing. Uniting with God in prayer during sickness brings comfort and peace which, in turn, leads to better physical healing and clarity of decision. Pray also for your medical teams daily—your nurses, doctors, and technicians—for their clarity, support, extra physical strength, stamina, patience, etc. They need our prayers not just during times of pandemic but always. Their jobs are physically, mentally, and emotionally draining; they need renewal many times during each 12-hour shift!

Our second group of Scriptures reminds us that teachers are called into service as well and have high standards for their work. The context is endurance; Paul had spoken of it in his own ministry and is now reminding Timothy that as a teacher, he must be patient, willing to endure

in order to pass on the wisdom and grace of salvation through Jesus. Teaching gifts build disciples of Jesus in our context too. The divine gifts they possess are similar to apostles' gifts: to carry out the message that we are God's children and through Christ, we are saved from sinful acts.

Teachers of all subjects, not just theology, are gifted with powers to lead, instruct, educate, and discipline. The Greek word, *didaskalos*, referred to specific skills like reading, writing, poetry, theatre, or music. That's where the word didactic comes from: "intended for instruction." It has become a negative word too: unwilling to change, but for our context in this Scriptural usage, it means "to pass on the torch," or to share one's wisdom with others in a methodical way. A bit like our prayer and action emphasis called "Everyone a Minister" that we learned about last week. Rest easy, I'm giving you another week before I hand out our forms and instructions.

Especially in these times in our culture and society, our teachers are asked to do more than ever in the schools, and they need our prayers, not just at the beginning of the school year, but daily. Teachers have different skill sets as well depending on their subjects of expertise. But today, teachers are also like parents, stepparents, or grandparents, giving their students life skills, tools, attention, nurturing, and even some the love they cannot find at home. We are speaking not only of secular teachers but also of church teachers, Sunday School, and Bible Study teachers. Let us pray for all teachers this special week and add them to your daily devotions. Thank you for your time, your commitment, education, wisdom, patience, stamina, and willingness to work with others to build up your students of all ages physically, mentally, and emotionally. This is

a divine gift you have, not just a degree, but one of divine power to edify and even sometimes to heal. We see you! We appreciate your work! We need more teachers of high quality and integrity, so pass on the torch. The students you teach today may be inspired to be the teachers of future generations. Of course, Jesus was the best teacher we Christians know, and for him we are grateful. It is that sacrifice on the cross that we will remember now through the Lord's Supper. May your healing and teaching sacrifices be fruitful and multiply as well. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you again for nurses and teachers and for the divine gifts you provide them. We thank you for sending Jesus into our midst to learn of your goodness and mercy. Be with the nurses and teachers in our world to guide their steps and to share their wisdom and giftedness. Help them to be courageous where needed; steadfast and disciplined in their own studies; loving and nurturing where hate abounds. Bless their efforts to love people as they fill their agape needs. And Lord, please bless these elements of communion so that we may bless others when we share our faith. We pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**