

James 5:17-20  
a community of prayer  
September 30, 2018 - The 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
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***Granma, why did Granpa have to die?***

The boy has been wanting to ask the question a long time; ever since his grandpa died, actually. They are on their favorite swing at their favorite time of day. It is getting darker earlier now, so he can see the first stars faintly appearing. It is cool enough for a sweater and the crickets are still singing.

*Well, granpa didn't have to die exactly when he did, but the cancer took him early.*  
***How come?***

*I don't know things like that, nobody can know everything.*

***Did you pray? Did grandpa?***

*We sure did, and still do. At least I do.*

***Then how come it happened?***

*Remember I said I don't know things like that, nobody can know everything.*

*We prayed because we love the Lord who loves us. That's why we prayed. Your Granpa never believed that he was so special that somehow he wouldn't die. He didn't pray that way, he prayed because he loved praying. Just praying. And he kept praying - I did too - all the way through the cancer that got him. Listening and talking. Mostly listening. He prayed for others, a lot.*

***Yea, but still. He died.***

*We had the circle pray for us and the prayer chain too. That was nice. The elders of the church and the pastor came over to pray with us, too. We prayed a lot and even sometimes sang together. But you need to know something. Your grandpa never thought that all the praying was to get something special for him that nobody else with cancer would get. That idea just didn't sit right with him. "If I do this, then God will do that", wasn't the way he believed.*

*Praying is no different than loving. You don't love someone just to get something out of them. You love someone because you love someone, it's hard to explain. But you know I will always love you, no matter what.*

***I know.***

*Well that's prayer. And you know what? There is something about all of us praying together that made his passing better. I can't say easy, you know that. But when the elders came over with a prayer, and sometimes a dish, it made us know the Lord was with us too. It seem like church all over again. In fact, some of those talks we had were the most real ever. Even that was like praying. People would get real honest. Ask your mother, she remembers talking with her dad and praying like never before. Once when the pastor came, he asked, if there was anything that need to be said - kinda like confession. Well, it was confession.*

### **What's confession?**

*It's when you tell someone the real truth, even the truth about what you have done wrong. And you let God know, too. That's prayer.*

*So I want to tell you, when you grandpa died, his heart was a peace with the Lord. And mine too. We had the church all around us. Even sang hymns right up to the moment he died. We did. I'll never forget that.*

*And I hope don't you either. Let's go inside.*

...

James, the brother of our Lord Jesus, assumes we want to be healed in every way. He says do whatever it takes to be whole; including perhaps the most outrageous thing of all: ***Confess your sins one to the other so that you may be healed.***

He is saying there is a connection between what scripture calls *sin* and our health. ***Not only for individuals, but the health of the entire community depends upon the capacity to name our sin aloud and seek forgiveness.***

Whatever we carry within us --unspoken, un-forgiven-- is a festering wound that poisons the whole body. If deep healing is ever to occur, it will be whenever risk speaking honestly, confessing openly the hurt we have done and the hurt received.

It's an ancient way to address the contemporary public health crisis, in our marriages and families, friendships and our country. This public health crisis is what is going on right now with the conversations about sexual assault and accountability from men in positions of power. The relationship between sin, confession and health has perhaps never been more clear on a public scale as it is in the #metoo era.

I'm thinking about truth telling in light of this ancient counsel from James and am particularly grateful for the persons in my life who have dared to bring me back from a false path. It's risky and courageous to confront one another but in my

experience, the truth has saved me from spiritual death and the consequences of error.

...

There is a profound relationship between the health of the body and the health of the spirit. Healing one brings health to the other. When the spirit is healed the whole social body is repaired.

Doctors know it; nurses know it and the Church knows it, too. In fact, I think it's common knowledge even though we may not speak about it in the same terms.

When women and men are able to speak honestly not only of their pain but of the sin that has caused us to stumble and do things we regret, healing is possible. Shame can be exorcised by the courage to confess to one another.

According to James, elders (and deacons) have a larger role to play than the management of a religious institution. They are the spiritual leaders to whom the community looks for wisdom and guidance. They are people of prayer, fine-tuned to be God's instruments of healing, a role the ancient traditions -Christian, Jewish and Native American knew well.

Our country along with the world community is weary, wounded and tired, full of dis-ease and in many places on the edge of life and death. Alongside that work is community of faithful people praying for the healing of every disease that plagues our common life.

***Prayer is the common practice of the people of God rooted in wisdom from above.***

This is the kind of congregation James envisions:  
People praying for one another in the hospital,  
the bedroom and the boardroom;  
the white house and the beach house,  
the living rooms and the policy rooms;  
on the streets and in the sanctuary  
in every place where human hurt abides.

***Let us pray for one another.***

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.