

“I Don’t Know How It Works!”

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

Sometimes I feel like the Wizard of Oz. When his identity has been discovered – when the “man behind the curtain” has been found out – he climbs into the basket of his balloon. While Dorothy is hugging and weeping and bidding everyone a fine farewell, the balloon comes loose from its moorings and up, up, and away it goes. Taking the wizard home, leaving Dorothy stranded. Dorothy pleads with the wizard to wait for her. Do you remember what he shouts? “I Don’t Know How It Works!”

Sometimes I feel like the wizard when it comes to prayer. My identity is known. The “man behind the collar” has been found out. I climb into my pulpit. While the people entrusted to me weep and despair, I loose my prayers from their moorings, sending them heavenward on their behalf. Then the Dorothys plead with me to teach them to pray and all I seem to be able to shout is: “I Don’t Know How It Works!”

We want it to be simple. We want it easy and direct. One stop, no hassle shopping, on the internet if possible, delivered right to our door the next day, the very next day. We ask. God gives. We receive. Sometimes we even remember to say, “Thanks.” That’s how we want it to be.

The writer of the Book of James, in today’s second reading, seems to indicate that it is that easy. “Are any among you suffering? They should pray, the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up, pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

The Jesus of the Gospels is a healer. Wherever he went Jesus relieved suffering. I suspect many of us here have come needing relief from some sort of suffering. And so we pray. We pray without really knowing how prayer works. It is a miracle of healing that we seek.

Some of you, today, will come praying, asking for relief from physical distress and seeking healing for illness of the body, for you or someone you love. Some will come praying, seeking peace in the midst of spiritual struggles, and seeking healing for illness of soul. Others will come praying, looking for an end to emotional turmoil and seeking healing for illness of the spirit. Some will come praying for help with relationships that are troubled. Others will come praying, seeking the strength needed to be a caregiver to one who suffers. Frankly, we could all come to pray to ask God to relieve our fears, to cure our anxiety.

It is a miracle of healing we seek, even if we don’t know how it works.

Do you know what I think one of the most things we do whenever we come together for worship? We do it every Sunday and the church has been doing it since its existence. It is in the prayers of intercession, when we pray for healing. We’ll do it, again, in a few moments. But unlike the healings that we sometimes see on television, no one here is likely to throw down their crutches, cast aside their oxygen masks, have their tumour disappear.

However, the miracle of healing will come among us today. Maybe it works like this. Someone with a serious illness will find comfort that comes from a reminder of God’s love, love that promises life in this world and the next. Someone whose faith has turned to doubt will renew their confidence in God’s presence in their lives. Someone who is depressed or anxious will place their cares and worries in God’s hands. Someone in a troubled relationship will resolve to try one more time or will resolve to end a relationship that is not life giving, with strength that comes from God. A caregiver will hear that he or she is a good and faithful servant ... that God knows of the work we do to bring help and healing to one another. These are the miracles of healing that will come.

Friends, maybe that's how it works. We seek healing, not alone, but in community. We come together today, as we do every Sunday morning, as individuals, but also as a community to pray, not only for ourselves, but for one another, as the writer of James encourages us to do. We pray for God's help to relieve our suffering and the suffering of our neighbours. We pray for the strength and courage we need to help one another in our suffering, wherever we go.

Our prayers and worship will be acceptable in God's sight because we come with humble hearts, asking that God's goodness be done among us, knowing that we are called to be Jesus' hands for one another. So, come with hope to pray for healing, even if you're not sure how it works. Come believing this promise from First Peter: "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever."

My brothers and sisters in faith. We do know that God struggles with us in our prayers. We do not pray alone. We don't know how it works, but we know that even when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit prays for us. The Spirit prays for us in sighs too deep for words.

Prayer. "I don't know how it works!" I just know that it does! I don't know how it works, but I know, just like the wizard's balloon, it takes us home. Prayer takes us home. In Christ's name. AMEN.