

**Text: James 1:5-8**

**Theme: God's Door Is Always Open**

**Date: September 24, 2006 (Pentecost 16B)**

In the name of Jesus, the friend of sinners, Dear Christian friends,

It was the summer of 1864. Our country was torn apart by the Civil War. Along the eastern seacoast two slaves escaped from a southern plantation where they had been held against their will. They were now making their way northward to freedom. Both of them had been seriously wounded in the escape and were badly bleeding. It was getting toward evening and the men so desperately needed something to eat and a safe place to treat their wounds.

All of a sudden as they were walking they came into a clearing. They couldn't believe their eyes. At the back of the clearing was a beautiful mansion with tall columns gracing the front entrance. One of the men said to the other, "Let's go see if the door is open. We need help. We have to try it." But the other man was afraid, "We can't risk it. What if the home belongs to another plantation owner? He may shoot at us, too; or refuse to help us; or worse yet, send us back to our owners." And so it was that they argued back and forth until darkness about whether or not the door would be open to them, whether there was someone home, and whether they could get help. Soon they both fell asleep from exhaustion in the tall grass at the edge of the clearing.

The next morning one of the assistants of President Abraham Lincoln was making the rounds of the grounds of the president's summer home. At the edge of the clearing he found the bodies of the two escaped slaves. They had both bled to death in their sleep. How sad, this presidential aide thought to himself, that these two men had come so close to freedom and so close to help; only to die. For on the front door of the president's house were the words, "My Door Is Always Open."

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There are still many today who are slaves. But I am not talking about physical or political slavery. Even though many people enjoy their physical or political freedom, they are slaves spiritually. The devil is holding them captive. They are laboring hard under the delusion that they have to earn their way into heaven. They are slaves to their own sins. They do not possess the freedom to say no to the devil. They do not have the spiritual power to stop following the unbelieving world around them. They are enslaved by their ignorance of the true God and what he has done for them and what he tells them about himself in the Bible.

Because of our sinful nature we struggle with our spiritual slavery. We come into the clearing of the beautiful mansion of the throne of God, bleeding and wounded with a conscience plagued with sin and a heart that is afraid of what might happen next. We see the door to God's throne and we think of all the help there might be behind that door. Maybe, we think, there is someone behind that door who could forgive our sins. Maybe there is someone who could help our marriage. Maybe there is a God in heaven who could straighten out our troubled child, who could lead us to understand our troubles, and could even heal the hurt of death.

But many slaves will die with their troubles at the edge of the clearing to the mansion and throne of God. They will die because they will not even try the door. They will bleed to death spiritually because they fear the door is closed to them or they will find an angry God waiting behind it. They will continue to be slaves because they never get close enough to find that the door to God is Jesus Christ. **And more than Abraham Lincoln ever did, Jesus freed the slaves, all of the slaves.** He fought the devil in our place. His perfect life and death on the cross set us free from the guilt and punishment we deserved for our sins. His resurrection from the dead crushed the devil and set us free from his grip. But many will never be healed, never be free because they did not get close enough to see the sign on the door of God, "My Door Is Always Open."

In our text for today God's Word speaks to us about approaching God in prayer. Today it is our privilege to once again be reminded of a message that our whole world needs to hear, "**God's Door Is Always Open.**" And although you and I do pray, it might also be a message that we need to hear because we often forget that God's door is open to us. The fact that God's door is always open is an invitation to us. It is an invitation to come in for our soul's sake; and it is an invitation to come in with confidence.

### **1. An invitation to come in for our soul's sake**

Most of us would probably be a little hurt if we were told that there might be something wrong with our prayer life. We pray. We pray in our church services. We pray at home. We pray before meals. We certainly pray in the hospital and on most occasions when we have a major problem in our life. We pray when we are worried and when we are afraid. But St. James says that there is something that even many Christians forget to pray for: **IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, HE SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO HIM.** All of us can certainly improve our prayer life by asking God for wisdom.

When St. James tells us to ask God for wisdom, he is not thinking about asking God to help us remember all the things we learned in high school. He is talking about spiritual wisdom. He is saying that we all need to ask God to make us stronger in our faith through his Word. Certainly we pray when we are sick or in the hospital and we ask God to make us better again. **But** do we ever ask God use this sickness for the health of our soul? Do we ask him to increase our faith in his promises in the Bible? Do we ask him to make us more interested in reading and studying our Bible? Have we ever asked God to give us a deeper understanding and acceptance of what we read in the Bible? In the verses preceding our text James says that one of the reasons God permits trials and troubles to enter our life is to make us dig deeper into his Word and make us stronger in our faith: **CONSIDER IT PURE JOY, MY BROTHERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE TRIALS OF MANY KINDS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH DEVELOPS PERSEVERANCE. PERSEVERANCE MUST FINISH ITS WORK SO THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE, NOT LACKING ANYTHING.**

One of the blessings that flow out of a stronger faith is a more spiritual attitude toward our prayer life. God is encouraging us that in general our prayers should be more spiritual. We will want to pray more for our soul than for our body. In the **Lord's Prayer** Jesus taught us to pray for our soul first, then our body. In fact, six out of the seven little prayers or petitions in the Lord's Prayer are prayers for the soul. **Do our prayers reflect that emphasis?** When we come into God's open door in prayer, we will also want to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then trust that all other things will be given to us as well; things for our body and life. The spiritual-minded prayer of a believer talks to God about his or her sin. Is there some sin that you keep returning to again and again? Have you prayed about it? If the sin is still there, keep on praying about it. Do you lose your temper a lot? Have you prayed about it? Do you have trouble forgiving your spouse? Then pray with a trusting heart, **FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.** Do you worry a lot? Then pray that God help you overcome your worries. Are you afraid of your troubles; afraid of being poor, afraid of what others think of you, afraid of getting sick, afraid of old age, afraid of dying? The wise prayer is not, "*Dear God, please take my trouble away.*" The wise prayer that St. James urges us to pray is, "*Dear God, give me the strength to bear my troubles by leading me deeper into your Word and giving me a stronger faith in your promises.*" Wisdom looks first to the soul. Wisdom asks for a stronger faith. Wisdom trusts the promises of God. When we are spiritually crawling and bleeding and wounded, let us remember that God's door is always open. Let us come in for the sake of our soul.

## **2. An invitation to come in with confidence**

When we come to the door of God with our prayers, God wants us also to come boldly. We do have a reason to wonder whether God's door is open at all. We have a good reason to doubt that God even hears our prayers. We have a reason to think that God will punish us when we come to him. That reason is our own sin. We have no right of ourselves to even think of approaching God in prayer. **And yet God has given us a reason to come** with complete boldness and confidence. **That reason is Jesus.** Jesus has washed away every sin we have ever committed. He has set us at peace with God. He has set us free from our slavery and made us God's own dear children. Jesus prayed with a perfect faith in the garden of Gethsemane; a faith that trusted the will of his heavenly Father; "*Not my will but your will be done,*" Jesus prayed. Yet Jesus suffered hell and died for all of our prayers tainted with the sin of doubt and worry; tainted with the sin of being more concerned with physical matters than spiritual matters. Jesus also died for every other sin of thought, word and deed. Because Jesus rose from the dead, God not only invites us, but even commands us to come to him in confident prayer. **CALL UPON ME IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE, AND I WILL DELIVER YOU,** he says through the Psalmist. **PRAY WITHOUT CEASING,** God said through the Apostle Paul. **ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU, SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND,** Jesus said, **KNOCK AND IT WILL BE OPENED TO YOU.** The doorway to God has been opened by Jesus. Don't just come to that door with your prayers. Come boldly and confidently, firmly believing what God says: **YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.**

St. James says that a faithless and doubting prayer, a prayer without boldness and confidence will not be answered. BUT WHEN HE ASKS, HE MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE HE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND. THAT MAN SHOULD NOT THINK THAT HE WILL RECEIVE ANYTHING FROM THE LORD; HE IS A DOUBLE-MINDED MAN, UNSTABLE IN ALL HE DOES. St. James is not talking about the kind of doubt that worries that God may not give us exactly what we ask for. If we ask for something harmful, God will not give it to us. Instead he'll give us something that's better for us. The kind of doubt that James warns us about is the doubt of unbelief. It's the doubt that wonders if God is really listening to my prayer because I'm such a sinner. It's the prayer that doubts God's forgiveness. It's the attitude, "*Maybe God will hear and maybe he won't; but it certainly doesn't hurt to try. I've tried everything else.*" The writer to the Hebrews says, **LET US THEN APPROACH THE THRONE OF GRACE WITH CONFIDENCE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED.** Think of how many things we have not received from God because we were too afraid to ask or doubted whether he would really listen.

God's door is always open. Let us not be afraid to come to him. Let us not continue to lie spiritually wounded and bleeding in the bushes because we are too afraid to try his door. Come to God for the sake of your soul. Come to God with boldness and confidence. Because of Jesus, God's door is always open. Amen.