**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**James 2:1-17**

**5th September 2021**

**Gathering & Centring**

Hello! Thank you for making a space to gather with us today. Being an online community was quite exciting at first, a new adventure, uncertain what would happen. I’m not sure we feel any differently now having done church this way for the last 18 months. And now things are finding their way back into church and groups planning on starting up again the question arrises about how we blend these things and not lose what we have gained.

But this is nothing new. Being church was never meant to be something that was settled. Being church, throughout history has always been unsettling, evolving, reforming. Of course, we haven’t always done that and we’ve had probably one of the longest settled periods of being church for the last 100 years almost. But what does it mean now, talking of blended models, online communities, face-to-face worship?

I don’t know. That’s what we are continually exploring together, and we find James in many ways is in the same boat with his community: moving from one model to another, one tradition to another, Jewish context to Gentile. So that is where we find ourselves over the next few weeks, gathering some of the ideas and thoughts we’ve explored here and other places, and ask what the church might look like if we let some of these ideas take root…

**Prayer**

Light that shines on our questions

And space for the exploring

Holy One among us

May we never take you for granted

Nor our calling to be your church

May we dare the spirit to love us

Challenge us

Call us

From where we are

Into the adventure called faith

May we call her

To disturb our easy illusions

Our familiar traditions

Our well worn words

And breath new life into them

Yet anchor that which gives us meaning

That which holds us steady

That which is a strength to us over generations

That we might take those things

As we find ourselves on new ground

May we make this space

A pausing space

A breathing space

For your love

That it may hold us

And affirm us

And forgive us

A love that names us

Knows us

And finds a home in us

A love that is called God

Ancient

Yet ever new

And in that gift

We find the life we need

As a community

To praise you

As a body

To honour you

As a family

To welcome you

And each other

Holy God

Light that shines on our questions

And the space to explore them honestly

We gather in your name

And make space for the world

Her hurt and her longing

Here among us

Hear us as we say the global prayer together

Our father

Who is in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us today our daily bread

And forgive us our debts

As we forgive our debtors

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil

For yours is the kingdom

The power and the glory

For ever

Amen

**Scripture Introduction**

I confessed last week I didn’t find the epistles, all the letters that were the communication tool of the early church, easy to read. Truly I don’t, but boy, they can be hard hitting. They are one sided, a letter in response to a situation or question of which we don’t know and can only surmise, so it can be difficult to get the inflection, the nuance, because you don’t know what James is specifically responding to. But, they are quite pointed and direct.

James exposes us to some pertinent truths for all of us in the church, not just his own who were trying to establish themselves, and work out what it meant to be church, but our version of church too, asking the same questions: working out what it means to be church, now.

**Scripture: James 2:1-17**

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.”

Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

**Reflection**

Is there much point on expanding what James says? He makes his points fairly robustly and clearly don’t you think. Seriously, read it again. And if we fulfil those last verses, perhaps that would be enough for one week, maybe even for a lifetime.

But taking the broader point of James, the way he is engaging with the local church, and exploring how to be church, what priorities to have, what values to shape the new church around, and what work the church should be doing, there IS more to say that might draw us into our present situation.

What will be offered over the next few weeks, is an invitation to reimagine the church. This will be limited, for it is culture and tradition bound, because it is difficult to reimagine things beyond our own experiences. That’s why the church needs more artists and poets (we used to call them prophets) in our leadership who can challenge us with images and words that are beyond where we have been before.

But it is also true, all new ideas, are actually old ideas. We shift them a wee bit, place them into a new context, find a different word to define them, but they are essentially the same ideas just reimagined. Nothing the church is or says is new. It can only be reimagined. So, we’re going to step into the future, worry less about it, taking ideas that have come from discussion and questions over the last few years, but have come into particular focus during these challenging pandemic months, and do as James has done, affirm faith around what is essentially gospel, and invite the church to grow round these in the next generation as our context changes.

These aren’t blueprints. These aren’t what we are definitely going to do. Far from it. These are pictures, to thoroughly explore, to challenge, to turn upside down, and, if you are like me, we’ll find ten reasons why they won’t work, before daring ourselves to ask: Well, I wonder what that might look like? That’s always my first reaction: why we shouldn’t do it, but let that pass because these are all old ideas, or questions the church has always been asking, and each generation has offered a different model in response to them as the context changes.

But before we get there, let’s sing, a traditional tune with contemporary words that speak into this context today.

**Reflection**

So, let’s begin to wonder what the church might yet look like.

Our calling is: in being loved by God we love our neighbour. And the way we do that, is build a church.

That’s essentially who we are and what we do.

But what does that church look like, and what might it yet look like?

We start where we were last week in James: a listening church. Quick to listen, slow to speak. How might we have ears to hear our parish and world?

How might we shape a listening place for folk to come to and in love and grace, and without judgement, just unburden themselves, dream, tell their stories, confess? BBC Radio 4 has this amazingly unexpectedly popular programme called the listening project where we listen in to a couple of people, some who have met before and some who haven’t, discuss whatever it is that is important to them. It is a cult programme about is listening.

Imagine us being there just to listen. To be there with others. I can imagine the church as an always open drop-in, where there is always someone to sit with another, and listen, never to judge, just to support, tell stories, share hurts. How much spiritual and mental good that could be for us all.

We so often think we know what is important but when we begin to listen to others, we realise we live in our own silos and worldview and miss most of what is reality for other folks.

Listening can grow. We have partly done our own listening project with some consultation we did a few years ago in order to evolve ourselves. What we heard then was the need for a better welcome, focus on enabling families to gather and be families together, the need to build stronger relationships with our neighbours, those isolated, connecting people again, to inspire creative ways to engage people, with community, shared passions, discussion, to seek and support the welfare of others and to learn to communicate, to tell our story and be a pace to share other’s stories.

How might all that look if we built the church round listening to people, and especially these six things we heard: welcome, families, relationships, creativity, welfare, communication.

Not one of these is new and all of them are gospel imperatives. Each one is a core activity in the gospel: a gospel that is not just about believing in something, but doing something because of those beliefs. Which is where we find James and his reimagining of the early church

So next week, and for a few weeks following, we’ll expand all of that and paint a picture of what that might look like: a church built on welcome, round families, in relationship, creative, seeking the welfare of others, and communicating the gospel, with or without words.

**Prayer**

Loving God

In the noise of this world

Of Afghanistan turmoil

And Tigray conflict

Of Syrian refugees and Yemen’s hungry

We pray

In the divisions between us in our own communities

The noise of prejudice

And the silence of the forgotten

Of the voices of the headline grabbers

And the excuses we all use

We pray

In the noise of our fears

And our struggles with the future

The arguments of leaders

And the worry of the church

We pray

May that noise

And that silence

Be our prayer

For in there

May you hear

The cries of the least and the lonely

The afraid and the fearful

The abused and the hurting

(Pause)

And may our ears be open too

Beyond our familiar world

And hear what the world is crying

What the environment is saying

What our communities are speaking

That our prayers shift

From words to being

From noise to ways of living

From lists to loving the world back

Loving God

In all the injustices of our world

The imbalance of life

Of hope

Of opportunity

Of wealth

Of resources

May we be found listening

Praying

And being your people

As we pray for those closest to us

Those ill and those waiting

Those grieving and those hurting

Those overwhelmed and those sad

Hear us

(Pause)

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**