**New Kilpatrick**

**26th September 2021**

**James 5:13-20**

**YouTube**

**Centring**

Spirit of peace

May we know your presence

In beauty and wonder

Spirit of peace

May we know your hope

In truth and imagination

Spirit of peace

May this time be yours

In word and silence

And in being here

With all those gathered

May we be a community of peace

**Introduction**

Thank you once more for inviting us to be with you today. We’ve been exploring what it means to be church using six different themes the session decided a while back to be the lenses through which we gather as a faith community: welcome, creativity, relationships, families, wellbeing, communication.

In many ways they all come down to one particular one, one indeed the whole gospel centres on and that is relationships. It’s all about relationships. It really is, and we get them right and we get them wrong and none of us are experts, which makes relationships with and in and beyond the church all the more interesting.

**Prayer**

Loving God

Forgiving God

Present with us

Here

Now

May we find the words

And the silences

That speak in this moment

Enough words and silences

To bring all we need to bring

Of the highs and lows

The worries and the pleasures

The questions and the stories

The troubles and the joys

Our fully human gifts

Our fully human lives

Our fully human stories

And may you hold them

And love them

And breathe through them

That we might find new courage

In the strength you offer

And the peace that is yours

And the hope that is always near

Loving God

Wherever we find ourselves

And whatever we feel right now

May we trust this moment

Is held beyond all moments

In a love greater that everything

And is your gift to us

(Pause)

Hear us as we share together the global prayer

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**

It’s all about relationships. Of course relationships are dynamic and dysfunctional and glorious and creative and soul destroying. We are human and the wonders of the good news is that all these dynamics of relationships fill our holy book.

Case in point is the letter to James. It is a book that has often been sidelined because of its focus on faithful action rather than just faithful belief. In this last chapter, however, a lot focusses on the dynamics of the relationships within the community of faith. James has found trouble there but points the community towards a relationship of compassion, care and prayer, holding each other, making room in our words and prayers for our companions on the way. Giving of self for them indeed: faith in action, prayer in action.

**Scripture Reading:** James 5:13-20

**13**Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. **14**Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. **15**The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. **16**Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. **17**Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. **18**Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

**19**My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, **20**you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**Reflection: Relationships**

Perhaps the one word that defines everything about a gospel that is dynamic and multilayered, and both a challenge and a support, is the word relationship. It is all about relationships. Yes we talk about justice, and forgiveness and about grace and love. These are the biggest words we have in our faith, but they mean little unless they are activated, and they are activated in relationships.

If we imagine our faith is only personal relationship with God, are we in relationship with God at all? One of the big ideas at the centre of our faith on God as the trinity. It isn’t biblical: it was created by the church to prevent believers slipping into heresy but the picture trinity offers is God in relationship.

And if Godself is a relationship, then everything we say, do, believe, understand, is based in that relationship. We aren’t individuals in the faith, we are a community of faith; together, we make up the whole body of Christ. Our faith is found in relationship, that is the dynamic of love, the focus of grace, the subject of forgiveness, the context of justice.

One of the other things the church has created but isn’t completely biblical is our creeds and that terrible gap between born of the Virgin Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate: that massive gap that is basically all of Jesus life: the bit about relationships: forgiveness, inclusion, justice, love. Completely missing from our creeds. The gospel is all about relationships, and the creeds mention none of that.

But James’ letter is the authentic article of the make-up of an authentic faith community thinking about how we relate to each other in this group of people experiencing and identifying with a variety of different emotions, needs, joys and concerns.

But as a faith community, as a parish church, that relationship is broader than the people we know. We are in relationship with our parish, so what do we offer that relationship? What do we uniquely bring to our neighbours that others don’t?

James perhaps has some insight: Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

One of the gifts of a community of faith is optimism for the future. Yes, the church can get very bogged down in the present. It feels like that at the moment, but who we really are, are people with a relationship with the future.

If we trust the stories of resurrection, then what is resurrection other than a relationship with the future. We believe into the future, we bring hope, we trust beyond the present, we have words for tomorrow, and stories aplenty to shape it.

Our faith is a relationship: we are people of faith but we have faith in people, we believe every neighbour is a gift to every neighbour, each uniquely seeing the world through their life experience. Through listening and forgiving and walking with each other, people change, we change, and grow and find new ways to live, explore God, love each other, and share life.

**Epilogue**

As an epilogue to the theme of relationships I don’t imagine a lot will disagree with anything said. So, that what might church might look like if we take these to some logical conclusion.

In 2016, Fuller Youth Institute released a study that looked at churches that were managing to “hold onto” their young people. One of the key reasons they found was “Warm intergenerational relationships”.

They found that “involving young people in every ministry allowed these churches to thrive with authentic and intergenerational relationships”

Darren Philips, who works for the church of scotland has explored the whole idea of intergenerational relationships and I’m not going to do his research justice here but some thoughts: children spend a short time in worship before leaving to take part in educational activities in a Sunday school. The church segregates the ages, where the adults worship and the children are taught. It means the relationships we have with our children are educational and one way: adult to child, where that relationship is a tool to influence what children believe, do, and understand.

But Jesus, is a person whose presence is to be experienced… rather than a mere object of knowledge. Thus for the sake of healthy relationships in the church with each generations ought we move from an age-segregated to an intergenerational

mindset.

And stretching that a little more: What if first and foremost we simply offer worship for everyone, maybe closer to our 9.30 model in summer, that keeps people together, and is intergenerational and stop Sunday school altogether.

And then following worship, we offer learning for all age groups, closer to the ‘Streams’ project we tried a few years ago, offering a choice of a traditional sermon style, a discussion with an expert, a bible study, and an activity based event, each based on the same theme but explored in different styles depending on how different generations learn.

These we have all tried before but never taken to their logical conclusion. I’m intrigued as to what that would be like, if we actually changed how we did church and created a model that invested in our relationships: authentic, intergenerational relationships?

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Creator God

Here we pause

And let the world speak

And we hold back the words

And listen to here

(Pause)

To the people of Afghanistan

To Syrian and Yemeni refugees

To creation groan

With what we have done

To the poor becoming poorer

And the rich richer

To power being an economy

That allows corruption and tyranny

(Pause)

And as we hear the world

And the voices of so many

So silent

For so long

May we change our relationship

With the world

With each other

With the environment

And let vaccines become a gift

And the environment a shared beauty

And politic the art of doing what is right

And faith the reason for it all

(Pause)

Creator God

Hold all whom we love

Family and friends

Those ill and those recovering

Those anxious and overwhelmed

Those physically ill

Those mentally ill

And hear them

And call us to live towards each other

In the name of peace

And the way of love

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**