**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**James 1:17-26**

**Sunday 29th August 2021**

**Gathering**

Hello! I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you that you have made space today for us. We offer a simple reflective service today, a listening place, where we are all invited to tune into some of the silences, some of the sounds of creation, some of the voices we hear, and listen, not for God’s voice if we imagine God speaking, but God’s presence, beyond words. And in listening to God in such a way, we learn to listen to our neighbour, our world, and creation.

So let us pause, light a candle, take a breath and centre ourselves.

**Prayer**

May we pause, O God

Draw breath

Deeply

And pause

And wait

On you

On ourselves

To let go that which we need to let go

Lay down that which is too heavy for us to carry

Let you hold that which we can no longer hold ourselves

And wait

Wait for the moment

When we feel the silence

Know it is part of ourselves

That sacred space

Where we meet you

And wait

Wait for your word

Yet unwritten

Yet undefined

Yet unexplained

But real

Present

The word that speaks our names

And wait

Wait,

And in such a place

So different from the world

Find this a holy space

Thin and close

In which we may pause

Draw breath

And listen

Beyond the world

Into the greater truth

Of your

Being

Here

No words: there aren’t any

No understanding: for we can’t

Just presence

Love

Grace

Listening

So be it

Amen

**Scripture Introduction**

We’re opening the Good Book at James this week and for the next few weeks. It’s a controversial book as there has been plenty of debate for the last thousand and a half years whether James should actually be in the bible at all. Luther had little time for it as it seems to contradict Paul’s theology. Some say it was written in order to contradict Pauls ideas about faith, and other that it simply understands faith in a different way.

I find these letters, difficult, Paul’s included, because there is a lot of systematic arguing, debating over terminology and a nuanced approach to details that I find difficult to follow. That’s fine for those who have big brains. But I am definitely a bear of little brain and much prefer my theology served more imaginatively, discovering the truth found in a good story. As humanity grew more ‘enlightened’ we seem to have dropped the tradition of telling the truth through story and now we fall out over the meaning of words. Can we not go back to the storytelling? People beyond the church just aren’t interested in, nor can make sense of these one-sided (for we only have one side of the argument in these epistles) but as a church we can offer some fabulous stories to help us navigate life.

Having said that, and we will say more in the next few weeks, James offers some insights into community life that are valuable but he invites us first to listen. Really listen. It is the beginning of all our relationships.

**Reading**

**17**Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.[a] **18**In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

**19**You must understand this, my beloved:[b] let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20**for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. **21**Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

**22**But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. **23**For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; **24**for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. **25**But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

**26**If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. **27**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

**Reflection**

How would the church look, if our first act in any project, decision, relationship, was to listen? I suspect we imagine ourselves quite good at listening after all it is what this place is designed to do: pews after all are designed to be hard enough and uncomfortable enough to sit up and listen, though often end up being used for a wee doze in after only a few minutes listening to me.

What if the church, not just this space, but our faith community, our activities, our raison d’être, were actually designed round listening to our neighbour, listening to the world, listening to creation, listening to God?

What would that look like? Our worship, not designed to appease God with praise and glory, as if we are in need to make sure God is happy enough with us before we can do anything, or designed to show how good and faithful we are by learning some theological understanding, but worship was first listening, connecting in relationship in listening to our stories with neighbour, world, creation, God?

Is it not true, our sole purpose as disciples is to live in relationship with neighbour, world, creation, God , yet we seem to have developed a model of worship that involves a lot of talking, especially in the protestant tradition, with an emphasis rightly on learning, and understanding. But is this our first priority?

The writer of James seems to have experience of this conflict and writes: be quick to listen, slow to speak. Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue. This is a deeply spiritual practice. This is how we model the kingdom says James, this is how we create good, faithful, practice: listen, then speak.

And how timeous and prophetic must that be for us now in church and nation: that our ears are directed outwards, beyond the circle we inhabit in the church, in our politics, in our communities, away from ourselves and the theological or political disagreements that are so important to us, yet so trivial to anyone looking on from outside who are crying for food, and equality, and hope, and opportunity.

When the church, like so many old institutions are in crisis, its the quality of our relationship with others that will mark us out as being existentially different, our ability to listen, to take into ourselves the stories and gifts and pain of others, and let that listening change the relationship we have with our neighbour, and singularly fail to judge. Rather, love. Because listening brings us close. In listening, we’ve been given a gift of honesty, the gift of trust from the other, the gift of compassion towards our neighbour.

Perhaps as disciples if we followed James’ thoughts, we would measure our faith by the relationships we have, and not by our understanding, or even good works, which is a main theme in James, much to the chagrin of Luther and so many who feel James’ letter should never have made it into the bible. But what if we measured our faith, not by works, not by understanding but by the relationships we have with each other and our parish?

Those relationships are our noticeboard, our shop window. They are much more easily understood than our words, or our beliefs, or our rituals. Listening takes commitment. Words are easy. We know the difference between the two and we see that difference too often in the negative.

As a church, now, in this season of deciding how we will be in the future, may we dare listen, make space for that gift: the time, the grace, the presence listening takes. May listening begin our worship, our relationships, our future, a kingdom shaped gift we can be to our parish, and our world, right now.

**News**  Think Tank 1st, 7.30, Zoom

COP26, new information has been posted

COP26 Window

Macmillan Coffee: details in bulletin

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

May we have ears to hear

And listen to the world

Her needs

Her joys

Her people

Her land

May we listen to the new song each morning in creation

And know its worth, its value

A creation that has integrity and seeks justice

Sustainably shared today

With enough for tomorrow

Yet her people so hungry in places

And over-filled in others

As we use land and sea unfairly

Caught up in an economy of wealth

Rather than one of justice

As we listen

May you be heard.

(Pause)

May we listen to the voices of those in Afghanistan

And Yemen and Syria and Tigray

All those in conflict

Crying for a freedom

Beyond the limits of religion and politics and the whims of other nations

A shared responsibility for all of life

As we listen

May you be heard

(Pause)

May we listen to our communities

To the prejudices we have

The fears we hold

The diversity we share

Hearing your voice, O God

In the voices of everyone

Beyond our silos and circles

All our longings

All our hopes

And as we listen

May you be heard

(Pause)

May we listen to what can be possible

A greater equality

A welcoming door

A growing together

And wary of words that are hollow

Politics that are selfish

Self preservation before giving of self

And as we listen

May you be heard

(Pause)

And may we listen to families and friends

Those closest to us

Whose stories we know best

For those ill physically and mentally

Those grieving and hurting

Those worries and anxious

Those down and sad

Those celebrating life

And as we listen

May you be heard

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**

Go in peace

And the grace…

**Doxology**