

**Kinross Church, Sunday 1st June 2025**

**Sermon by Alex Johnson**

In my first job since leaving university, I went on a training day fairly early on about leading teams of volunteers. And we were asked to write down what percentage of our working hours were spent on administrative communication. So not a heart-to-heart or pastoral conversation, but simply communication about what needed done, by when, and who was going to do it. In essence, what percentage of your time is spent on emails.

Well one by one the group revealed their numbers. 80%, 90%, before someone shamefully admitted it was maybe only 70%. Eventually, I had to sheepishly reveal that I had written down 50%. What I kept to myself was that I had pushed it up a bit because I could sense the direction of the conversation. Apparently, as I learnt that day, work in the modern era should be 80-90% emails!

I learnt that day just how much of adult life is simply moving bits of information around. Keeping people in the loop, making sure people are aware of what's going on, reminding people of things they said they'd do. It was an unbelievable introduction into the life of managing volunteers and what it takes for organisations to function. So if you ever get an email from me and you question whether it was really necessary, just rest assured I'm simply trying to bump my stats up to reach the goal set for me on that day.

Yet communication is so central to our existence. Some people embrace that, and you are a pleasure to work with, while others of us have to develop a discipline of communication. But as we follow on from the idea in last week's sermon, that the Trinitarian understanding of God opens up a fundamentally relational understanding of existence, we come to understand that need to communicate is not just as an administrative chore but as part of our mirroring of the divine life.

Indeed, we see in today's reading an outworking of that interpersonal dynamic between God the Father and God the Son. God is a community into which we are invited, and we see that relationship at work as we read Jesus' prayer at the close of the Farewell Discourses in John's

Gospel. But if ever there was a pointless bit of communication, surely this is it. Jesus, who is of the same substance as the Father as the Nicene creed puts it, nonetheless fires of an email to him, presumably an email that Jesus could answer for himself.

And yet, we benefit from listening to this prayer. Hearing the inner dynamic of the Trinity, as Son talks to Father. For it is a prayer about us, about Jesus' disciples and those who believe in him because of their message. We are given the insight that Jesus prays for us. That the interpersonal dynamic of the Trinity isn't self-centred, instead it lives out its capacity for love in praying for us, in going out from itself into creation and into humanity.

It may be the most unnecessary piece of communication ever but it is so deeply caring and passionate. It is emotive. It invites the disciples, and by extension ourselves, into the life of the Trinitarian God, uniting us with Jesus who is in turn bound to the Father. Jesus speaks as a parent, keen to protect but knowing that challenges will inevitably come their way. And so he prays that he will not be ultimately separated from his disciples, instead he looks forward to being reunited with his disciples when the time comes.

This is a prayer we can turn to, because it is an ongoing prayer of Jesus. It is uttered over you and over me. The love of God poured out in intercession for God's world. Whatever our days hold, we are being prayed for by God himself. Whenever you are out of your depth or too busy answering those hundreds of emails or just not sure who is really on your side, the prayers of God are shared over you.

This shifts our understanding of prayer. How often when someone turns to you and says, 'I'll keep you in my prayers' does it connect with you? How often do you interpret it as a platitude? A way of building space into a conversation that has some kind of uncomfortable negative aspect. Such sentiments communicate that the person doesn't know what they can do or how to respond, so they offer what they can, to pray for you. We're often left disappointed by that, perhaps quite rightly. Yet, we can take the time to appreciate what that means, it means someone is holding space in their lives for you. Ideally, they are opening themselves up to your pain and your joy. Opening themselves up to service.

But we have a confused relationship with prayer. We can't quite pin it down. Throughout 2025, the Listening Project has been meeting once a month to try and make some progress into what it means to communicate with God because it is not an easy thing to understand. On Thursday night we sat in the 'New Room' at Portmoak church prayer weaving. As I sat weaving strips of cloth into my homemade loom alongside my other diligent weavers, I questioned whether I was actually praying or just using a repetitive task to crowbar in a slice of peace into the day. I was gently challenged by that activity on how centred on words my concept of prayer really was. We imagine prayer as we see it on a Sunday, words spoken in the direction of heaven. Yet, that intra-Trinitarian communication presumably needs no words, as much as we are given words in this passage. So let's open up our prayers beyond our words. Let us make it about the space created by the openness of God.

We have a complicated relationship with prayer in which we wrestle with its impact on reality. As the commissioners at the General Assembly debated assisted dying we heard tales of miraculous recoveries from terminal diagnoses, the power of prayer at work. But we also heard stories of painful deaths, where even heartfelt cries to simply end the suffering took too long to be answered. We are left with questions about the impact of prayer. Indeed, even this prayer of Jesus has had mixed results. Its primary focus being around church unity, which has been a mixed bag over the centuries. Yet, again, we can participate, share space with that prayer in our own lives, shaving in the mind of Christ.

Today's passage is quite simply a prayer. A prayer that has yet to be fulfilled 2000 years later. Yet, it invites us into that world of unnecessary interpersonal communication that I began with. It shares something of the love of God, the active love of God, towards humanity. So much of human existence is communication, 90% of it apparently, and prayer is an invitation to share a space with God, to build that relationship, with words or without, with requests or with doubts. It is an opportunity to respond to that outward facing nature of the love of God, to pick up the melody of Jesus and the hum of the saints. For we are being prayed for by God himself, invited into the Trinity.

Amen.