

Address – 28/6/26**'Prayer'**

I wonder what you have taken from our readings from the Letter of James over the last few weeks? For my own part, I have certainly found it challenging, but always very practical rather than theoretical (which is maybe why it's been so challenging). James' message has been about *doing* and not just about believing.

Those he was originally writing to were under stress as they tried to live out their faith and many of us can relate to that, although we are not actually subject to persecution for our faith as some of them were. James doesn't sugar-coat the experience of church that some of them were struggling with – there was favouritism being shown and we need to take heed to the way we behave as a congregation, welcoming all and offering the same Gospel challenge to all.

The thing that has struck me most forcefully is the number of echoes there are in James' words to the teaching of Jesus Himself and particularly the Sermon on the Mount. And so it is perhaps fitting that as the letter draws to a close we find James reflecting something that was very high on Jesus' own agenda, namely the priority of prayer.

We are urged to pray if we are facing difficulties; we are reminded to sing praise to God when we are happy; we are exhorted to take prayer for healing seriously as a church and also to recognise the importance of acknowledging and confessing our sin and praying for forgiveness for ourselves and for others. We are given the example of Elijah who was bold in his praying and who saw his prayers answered.

What James is encouraging us to do is to make prayer a lifestyle, the expression of a relationship with God that is not sporadic but constant, our first thought rather than an occasional afterthought.

We are reminded that prayer is meant to be a communal activity as well as a private one. I know that many people struggle with the idea of praying openly with others and I suspect that that is sometimes a reflection of a hesitant personal prayer life. There is

no shame is admitting that prayer is sometimes a struggle – I often struggle to pray but I'm very glad that there is an expectation on me to lead you in prayer week by week because it makes me do it even when I'm not really feeling up to it. Let me encourage you to think that there is also an expectation on each one of you to pray, not only for yourself and for your nearest and dearest but for your brothers and sisters in Christ, for the ministry and mission of this church and for the growth of God's Kingdom. What if we were to take Jesus at His Word and ask, seek, knock - ask the Lord and receive what He desires to give, seek what God is longing for you to find, knock on heaven's door and discover what treasures are prepared for you when the door is opened. Elijah was bold in what he dared to ask God to do, and though he undoubtedly went through difficult times no-one can deny that God answered his prayers in sometimes spectacular ways. Jesus Himself prayed as He breathed and as a result He walked in such close communion with His heavenly Father that heaven came to earth wherever He went – people were healed and lives were transformed. The early Church took up the baton that Jesus had handed them and it should be no surprise that as they trusted God in prayer the Church grew exponentially and great blessing was known among them and through their work and witness.

So what I want to encourage all of us to do today and during the coming week is to be bold in your prayers – ask, seek and knock and let's see what God will do among us and through us for His glory and for the blessing of many.

Introduction to Breakout Prayers

James reminds us that prayer is for every part of life: in times of trouble and joy, in sickness and healing, in confession and forgiveness.

We are going to spend the next 15-20 minutes exploring different kinds of prayer. There are details of 6 prayer activities on the sheets you were given as you came in. You are welcome to visit one or more of the prayer stations during that time. Or if you prefer, you can remain where you are and spend the time in

silent prayer. All I ask is that you don't spend the time chatting – leave that for coffee time afterwards.

1. If you would like someone to pray with you, Emma and I will be in the Discipleship Corner at the back – I'll let Emma say a wee word about what you can expect there.
2. If you would like to light a candle as a sign of your prayer for someone, there is a table at the back on the other side. There's a bit of space there to stand and pray after you have lit the candle.
3. At the front by the door to the meeting room there is a Prayer Tree and some tags on which you can write a prayer and hang it.
4. Again, I'm going to hand over to Emma to say a little about the labyrinth prayer.
5. If you would like to go outside for a few minutes you can take a walk round the cemetery, or you could pick up a stone from the vestibule – hold it and feel the weight of a burden you are carrying at the moment; then take it round to the Cross in the church garden and lay it down as a sign that you are giving it up to Christ.
6. If there is something you wish to confess privately before God, write it on a piece of paper at the other table that is near the door to the meeting room. Then crush the paper in your hand and place it in the bin as a sign of God's forgiveness

The time of quiet prayer and reflection will start when Emma rings the bell and when you hear the bell again in about quarter of an hour, make your way back to your seat and we will sing again. So let's still ourselves and let us all pray.

Prayer Space

1. Healing Prayer and Anointing
2. Light a Candle
3. Prayer Tree
4. Labyrinth Prayer
5. Lay Your Burdens at the Foot of the Cross
6. Confession and Release