

Koinonia-Fellowship G James 3:13-4:3, 7-8, Mark 8:30-37 Sunday 19 September 2021

This will be the 7th in our series on Koinonia-Fellowship. Unlike the last 4 messages in the series which were given on Zoom, we are once again together and, I hope, more able to put into practice the insights we are gaining into being fellowship in Christ.

PPT We've looked at how God invites us to be one with the Trinity and each other in the same sort of fellowship the Trinity enjoys within God-self as Father, Son and Spirit.

We have contemplated Jesus' prayer for this profound God-centred unity and that the early church devoted itself to this immediately after it's formation the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost.

We have considered where God may be thought of as being in our fellowship, in the space among us where God's Spirit chooses to dwell like a dove in a place of peace. We can choose to preserve this precious gift of spiritual fellowship or we can damage it, defile it by our words or behaviours.

We reflected on the difference between koinonia-fellowship and the sort of friendship circles there might be in a club or group focused around what people have in common, that we are in fellowship with people who are different from us, not just our mates, that if Christians are devoted to the fellowship of the Spirit they will be relating to those they would not normally relate to with honour and respect as if they mattered as much to them as their closest family, and they would be speaking of them to others with that same honour and respect, a real counter-cultural behavior which witnesses to others – how these people love each other. We need to be seen as a bit different from the ordinary kiwi here – kiwis with a Christ-like edge!

We looked at these aspects of behavior in Christian fellowship in the light of Jesus' prayer for his disciples and those who would follow him that - 'they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me'.

What does this mean for our fellowship? That if we are speaking of Jesus to people and speaking of and trying to demonstrate God's love for them, we need to be showing that sort of love for one another. Two ways we've looked at so far in which we can show that love which really stand out in today's world are the ways in which we speak well to and of each other and the ways in which we relate to and treasure those different from us in our fellowship, as if they matter to us as much as our mates.

Then last week we began to look at how, like God, the Trinity who invites us into their fellowship, our koinonia-fellowship is also open and inviting, meant to grow. This is why our counter-cultural behaviours of speaking well to and of each other and relating to those who are different to us with honour and respect are important. To be followers/disciples of Jesus, growing in Christ-likeness, in godliness, we are to be as open as God is to the other, to those we do not know, and be ready to welcome the other into our koinonia-fellowship. This begins by being ready to share our names like God did with us, stepping out into intentional conversation, one where the most important reality of our life is brought into it – our life in God. Intentional conversation is part of being an intentional disciple. It is realizing that our conversation builds our fellowship, both with those already here and with those whom God wants to reach. Francis spoke of the aid we have to start this fellowship-building-conversation with those whom God draws to this space – our name badges.

As I was reflecting on his message last week I thought of how when I was leading a youth church in NZ and then later youth groups in Europe, I was aware that the youth grew massively in their confidence and ability to speak about their life in God with their friends when we practiced it among ourselves, challenging each other to bring that into every conversation about daily life when we were together. We even had games that helped us to think about how to speak about God in relation to everyday objects and just get

used to talking about God, finding the words that were real to us. From what I have so often heard from adults, speaking of our life in God is not easy and we need practice too. This is the sort of intentional conversation we can have within our fellowship when we are together, working out how we can find a reason to pray a quick prayer on the spot, or refer to a Bible verse, or to an experience of what God has done for us (a testimony), in everyday conversation, in a natural way – because our life in God is real and we want to speak of that reality. If we can't speak of our life in God in a natural way with each other, how will we do so with someone who doesn't know God. If we can only speak about our life in God when we are doing Bible Study or discussing specifically Christian things, how will we ever speak of it to someone who doesn't naturally speak of those things. And if we are relating as much as we can of our ordinary life to the centre of our life – our relationship with Jesus – when we speak to each other in our fellowship, we will truly be building up the body – growing in our excitement for who God is and seeing God at work among us – growing in our fellowship too.

Today I am looking at more of what James and Jesus help us consider about our devotion to the fellowship of the Spirit. Today's passages point to the contrast between the world, our surrounding culture, and God's ways – so essential to think about for us to be a koinonia-fellowship that really witnesses to Jesus in today's world.

James here contrasts worldly wisdom with wisdom from above. Wisdom is how we think about life, our thinking about how to live well. This can be worldly or Godly.

False wisdom, James claims, comes from jealousy and selfish ambition, traits that lead people to believe that they are better than others and that they have nothing to learn from other people. James calls this earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

The true wisdom that comes from above as God's gift, on the other hand, is marked by a practical purity that is shown in qualities of peacefulness, gentleness, willingness to yield to the other, mercy, and other good fruits that are devoid of partiality and hypocrisy. It is not surprising that these qualities sound very much like what common sense would identify as goodness. Because that is the way of wisdom from above. It is the sum of all that common sense would identify as the marks of wholeness in human relationships, as the very best of God's gifts in creation, as what makes for koinonia-fellowship. Wisdom is born from above in order to spread healthy and holy ways of being a community, a fellowship in Christ.

Wisdom is also practical, it is about doing. Our good works are a mark of wisdom. This is about the day to day affairs of this world, speaking and acting in peaceable, humble ways without partiality. This is about relating in godly ways and speaking in godly ways in our everyday life, not just thinking like a Christian.

Worldly wisdom is about knowing how to get what you need and want for yourself. We see that all around us – in competitiveness, politicking, fighting for one's rights, in working out how to get around systems in legal or illegal ways for one's own benefit. That is the sort of thing I read about in the paper every day, basic materialism, our desire to spend what we have on our pleasures. James sounds very modern in the way he identifies our difficulty in satisfying our insatiable wants and desires for things, as the root cause of the inevitable coveting and cravings that lead to conflict, disputes, and even wars. While worldly wisdom, the ways in which people think to satisfy their own needs and desires, leads to disorder and conflict, godly wisdom makes peace and resolves such conflict and ensures righteousness/justice prevails.

Godly wisdom requires us to be humble and willing to yield to the other for their good. Jesus too, in today's reading from Mark, speaks of being last, and servant of all. And he uses the example of a child. In that society children were regarded as nothing. That is why the disciples didn't want the parents to bring their children to Jesus. They were so unimportant. But Jesus cuddles the child and says – if you

receive/welcome one of these – the least important sort of person, in my name, you receive me and the one who sent me – God the Father.

So koinonia-fellowship, where the dove of peace, the Holy Spirit, can dwell among us, is characterized by godly wisdom, by this humble attitude of putting the other first, being gentle and merciful, impartial and pure, and not self-centred or envious in any way. But how do we get there? How do we change what seems like our basic human nature to seek our own way and our own desires? Jesus speaks of repenting and believing. James goes into this further.

Submit to God, and resist the Devil (and his devilish wisdom as James described worldly wisdom earlier). In other words we have to choose between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom, between living God's way or living the devilish way. The choice is ours. Submitting to God involves letting go of our own pride in what we would do and humbly accepting that God knows best and his ways are better than our ways.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. How do we do this? In prayer especially, not praying for what we want, for more to spend on our own pleasures eg. , but rather for more godly wisdom, for all that I have just described, in humility. As we draw near to God and focus on him and his ways we will find the ways of the world will grow less prominent, that the devilish, earthly wisdom will appear less attractive, that the Devil will flee. And God longs to be closer to us as we let him, as we invite him to be close.

Cleanse your hands ie do what is practical to put things right, and purify your hearts, bring your intentions in line with God's will.

Repenting and believing, turning from what is wrong and towards God, involves all these. Let us submit to God, turn away from the Devil's worldly wisdom and draw near to God, humbly deciding to do his will now.