

Together in Humility and Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together for a short time this evening and look at the words that we've been reading Acts chapter 2.

And reading again at the beginning of the chapter, when the day of Pentecost came, arrived, they were all together in one place.

Today is a very special day in the life of this congregation. Every time we sit at the Lord's table, it is a very special occasion.

Every time we come to worship, it's a very special occasion. But when we sit at the Lord's table, we're doing something that the Lord has commanded us to do. We're focusing our attention particularly in his death.

And we believe that by faith, as we've already heard this weekend, by faith God comes to us and he blesses his people as they remember his death.

[1 : 2 3] As a congregation, we now do this four times. Two times traditionally with guest speakers, but then two additional communions.

And there's a sense in which there is something extra special about our two newest communions. And that is because the congregation comes together.

And many of you have commented since we started doing this. Many of you have commented on how this particular fact of coming together as a congregation has meant such a great deal to you.

And so it should. And that's right that we should feel that way. And I can't help thinking of these words in Acts chapter 2. And how they not only set the scene for Pentecost, and all that took place at Pentecost, when God himself poured out the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the church, to fill the Spirit, to fill the church with the Spirit, and to empower them on the mission that Jesus had set before them.

But it also sets the scene for what God wants the church to be. Together. Together.

[2 : 4 3] Together. And if you need proof of that, I don't think that we don't need to go very far into the Bible to get proof of the great desire, the purpose of God, is that his church be together.

John chapter 17, the chapter that we read last night at the preparation service, twice, on two occasions during that prayer, Jesus prays specifically that his disciples and those who would come to believe in the Lord through the gospel would be together.

And verse 11, I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. And I am coming to you. Holy Father, he says, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

And then later on, that's the very same prayer. In verse 22, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one.

And if you move on into Acts chapter 2 and verse 44, it becomes immediately clear that the church were united in heart and mind and spirit.

[3 : 58] Acts chapter 2 and verse 44, all who believed were together, but not only together outwardly. First Corinthians in chapter 1 and verse 10, written some years later on, tells us, I appeal to you, brothers, says Paul, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

So togetherness or unity, according to the Apostle Paul, was not just something that came automatically, but it was something that they had to work at and make a point of focusing upon.

Well, I'm not going to, I was going to spend a little bit of time on the significance of the day of Pentecost, but I don't want to do that. I want to just focus on these words.

They were all together in one place. And as I said before, these words, they set the scene not just for Pentecost, but for what the Lord wants his church to be.

And unfortunately, as we know, sadly, the church of today, the church, even amongst those who truly love and truly worship the Lord and who believe in Jesus as the Son of God, who believe in the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, they believe in the Bible as the Word of God, and yet, even the church that believes in him and loves him is so fragmented.

[5 : 40] I'm not going to spend the rest of this evening criticizing the church for that because we are part of a fragmented church, and it's a mystery. It's a real mystery how in the course of the history of the church it has come to be so fragmented.

Before I say anything else, we mustn't lose, we mustn't just say, oh, well, because it's fragmented, then we lose all hope and the church has lost its purpose and everything. It's God's church.

Even in its, even when things go wrong with a church, it never ceases to be God's church, and God continues his own work through the preaching of the gospel and through people being converted and through witnessing and belonging to their own congregations and by being committed to the work of the church.

And nevertheless, it's a fact today that the church has never been as fragmented as it is today. I was over this week, as you know, in Holland.

I was at the General Assembly of our sister church in Holland, and part of the General Assembly for our benefit was a lecture that was given to us on Wednesday about the history of the Dutch Reformed Church since the Reformation.

[6 : 56] And I can tell you that within 20 minutes, my head was in a spin because of the number of divisions and splits and reunifications there were, all of which results in today many, many, many, many different, let me just tell you some of them.

You know, just some, and these are all churches that are Reformed churches. There's the old Reformed congregations, there's the Reformed congregations outside the Federation, there's the Reformed congregations, there's the Reformed congregations in the Netherlands and North America, there's the Christian Reformed churches, there's the restored Reformed churches, there's the Reformed Christian churches liberated, there's the Netherlands Reformed churches, and these are only just some of them, only just some of them.

And our history is not much better. I could go into some of the various. How are we to learn from all of this? Maybe some of you say, well, how dare you go into a chapter like, just even saying what you've just said, even just listing the number of fragmented churches that there are, then how in the world can you possibly show your face?

And some people, of course, use this as a huge excuse why they shouldn't believe the gospel. Maybe there are people here tonight and you say, well, this is what I've been saying all along. Why should I believe in Jesus Christ?

Why should I have him as my Savior when your example is so poor? Well, you should have him as your Savior because he is the way and the truth and the life.

[8 : 36] I'm not making any excuses for our example as churches and as a church. Not making any excuse. I wouldn't even dare to make an excuse.

The church is not the way it should be. There are many things which are wrong within the church. Many, many things. But whatever you do, don't allow that to be an excuse for you not to come to faith in Jesus.

Because one day God has promised that he will resolve all of these issues. Not only so, but God has promised day by day to work all things together for good to those who love him and to those.

It's God's church. And today, the church doesn't exist on the basis of our unity. The church exists on the basis of Jesus' promise on this rock I will build my church.

And the gates of hell, he says, will not prevail against it. Now that's all I need. And what I need is just to listen to those words and I know that one day God will bring out of all this chaos.

[9 : 52] And remember, the chaos is because we live in a sinful world, a world full of sinful, selfish, proud human beings. Even in the church, we are still a sinful, although we are a forgiven people, we are still sinners.

And that sin manifests itself within our relationships and within our understanding and within our objectives and all of these things. That sin is so obvious to everyone.

But don't let that be an excuse for you. Don't let that be a reason for you to stay outside of the kingdom. The gospel is the power of God to salvation. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

So you come and you put your trust in Jesus and then you commit yourself to the church and come and be part of the greatest movement on earth.

You say, how can you say that? Because Jesus has promised it. It's Jesus' church. It's his. It's his body. And whilst there are so many things that have gone wrong with the church, so many areas of disunity and disharmony, it's still his church.

[11 : 09] And you know, in the gospel, we are one. And I'm not making an excuse. I know that we should be more than that, but in the gospel, we are one.

That was why it was important for me as a member of a sister church to go over and spend a week with my brothers and sisters in the church which we have a very precious relationship with and to take part in their decisions and their debates and the issues.

Many of these issues are the same issues as we are wrestling with in the Reformed church in this country and in the free church and in churches in America. And it's important, even although we belong to differing denominations, to recognize our oneness in the Lord and our love for one another.

And it is marvelous to be able to go and pray with other Christians and to worship with other Christians and to sing about the glory of God and the glory of the gospel in Jesus.

Just because we are fragmented doesn't mean we're fighting one another. and certainly we should be making every effort to try and to meet together in the bonds of the gospel.

[12 : 23] Is there any explanation for disunity amongst believers? How can we learn from what the Bible has to say? We read there that they were all together in one place and things look so positive and so promising for the church at the very beginning.

But it doesn't take long if you read the book of Acts to discover that problems soon begin to creep into the church and they threaten the church and the well-being of the gospel and they begin to cause that disunity and disharmony amongst God's people.

And the reason is, of course, any time you get sinful human beings you always get a threat and a danger of disunity. I'm going to do three things. I want to just focus on three things to try and to understand how disharmony and conflict can come in even to the church and what we can do in our own small way to guard against that disunity and to the...

Because when we recognize the problems and where the dangers occur, then we will be ready to tackle those dangers and prepare for them. Very often, we fail in every area in life because we're not prepared for the problems that arise.

So that's why it's useful to come back to the Bible and to ask what kind of problems does the Bible warn us about? Even 2,000 years ago, people are people and people don't change.

[13 : 58] It doesn't matter what century they live in. Is there any explanation for disunity? Well, first of all, I would say this. The combination of differing personalities is always a dangerous thing.

The combination of differing personalities is always a dangerous thing. Let's look at this original group. They were all together in one place.

Now, who are they? Who are they? Well, we know at the very least there were the 12 disciples. minus the one, but obviously at the end of chapter 1, another one, Matthias, had been added to make up the number once again after Judas had committed suicide.

So there were the 12 apostles, the 12 disciples who had been with Jesus. But, it wasn't just the 12 disciples. There were many, many more disciples who had witnessed the resurrection, who had watched Jesus rising up into heaven, and who now were left to worship him on earth by faith and to go into all the world and to proclaim the gospel after the Holy Spirit had come upon them where they were.

There were all kinds of different people. There were, we've got every reason to suppose that Mary Magdalene would have been there, Mary and Martha, Joseph of Arimathea, Zacchaeus would have been there who was up the tree and who was converted in the branch of a tree, Bartimaeus, the blind man, blind Bartimaeus who had called out to Jesus.

[15 : 33] He would have been amongst them, I'm sure. Nicodemus would have been amongst them. I'm sure that the Sanhedrin would by that time have thrown him out of the Sanhedrin because he declared his love for Jesus when he took his body down off the cross.

All of these people would have been together. Now, can you imagine all of these different personalities? You see, we get this rosy picture of the church as it was then and we imagine that there were no problems.

Don't believe that for a moment because wherever you get different backgrounds, different intellects, different personalities, then you always get the potential for division.

And that's why it doesn't take long in the book of Acts before that division starts to creep in and even throughout the rest of the New Testament. Paul appeals to, he appeals to those who are in leadership and he appeals to those who are young and he appeals to those who are old.

He appeals to those who are children, obey your parents. Why? Because there was a conflict situation between parents and children. He appeals to slaves and their masters. Why?

[16 : 49] Because there was a conflict danger between slaves and masters. Slaves were saying, well, I'm converted now, I'm off. Masters were saying, I don't care if he's converted, I'm going to treat him the same way as I've always treated him and so on and so forth.

Wherever you get sinful human beings, you always get the potential of, who was Uodia and Syntyche? You'll find these two women in Philippians and Paul says, I entreat them, I appeal to you to agree in the Lord.

Now why does he say that? Because he heard that there must have been this argument, this personality clash between those two women, same as you might get in any congregation, not just amongst women, but amongst women and men, old and young, doesn't matter who they are, then there's always the same one.

Do you notice this? That the real challenge is not how much you know of the Bible. I'm not suggesting for a moment that you stop learning the Bible.

far be it from me to suggest any such thing. We need to grow in knowledge. But we also need to grow in grace. Do you know what that means?

[18 : 01] It means having the kind of personality and attitude that imitates Jesus. And we do that particularly in our relationships to other people.

people. We are to love one another as I have loved you. Now it's one thing to say that. It's another thing altogether to put it into practice, especially when there's somebody who you find difficult to get along with.

There's nothing new about that. These men and women would have found the same difficulty to get along with one another. In fact, I make no apology for saying this, that they definitely found it difficult because, well, remember that passage in 1 Corinthians in chapter 12, where there was obviously this kind of problem in the church.

And where Paul had to say, look, he says, some of you are saying to others, I don't need you. It was obvious. Some of them thought so much of themselves, they said to others who perhaps weren't as gifted, this church really has no place for you.

I don't know if they were saying it openly or they were saying it secretly or whatever. They were complaining and moaning to one another and they were going behind people's backs and they were deriding one another and all that kind of thing. And they were saying, I don't need you.

[19 : 27] Others, on the opposite end of the spectrum, were saying they were so aware of their own inabilities that they were saying, I've got no place in this fellowship. And Paul's saying, don't go any further.

Because he says, God has put you together. God has brought you together. You know, if we were going to start our own church, God forbid that we should ever think about it.

Anytime I hear about starting my own church, you know, it's the most awful thing anybody could say. you've got no right to start your own church.

There's no such thing as your own church. It's God's church. It's Christ's church. And we've got no right to talk in that room. But if we were, you would choose the kind of people you thought you would get on with, wouldn't you?

We would choose, we would be very selective about the kind of people that we would want to be part of our own church. It would be the worst decision you'd ever make in your life. Paul says you have no right to look down on anyone.

[20 : 39] He says at the same time you've no right to dismiss yourself and to think that you've got nothing to offer to the rest of the congregation or the rest of the fellowship.

God has brought you all together and the challenge is for you to love one another and for you to work together for the cause of Christ.

And that does not come automatically because wherever you have sinful people the combination of differing personalities is always going to lead to a potential for conflict.

And I'm saying that in order for us all to beware, to be ready, to be forewarned and then to be forearmed because the devil comes in and he causes mayhem in a fellowship in that he and he sows the seeds of dislike and irritation and people who don't get on with one another.

That's the challenge, the challenge of the gospel. That's what people look for in a fellowship. They look for the reality of the gospel in people's lives and in the way that we relate to one another.

[21 : 54] And you know, in a place like this, like Stornoway, it's very obvious because people know who are Christians and who are not. They know what church you belong to.

They know who else belongs to a church and they know how well you get on with someone else who belongs to the same church. And there's nothing worse than when they see and they say don't tell me anything about the gospel because you can't even get on with one another.

You can't even work with that person. You can't even work in the same office as that person. You can't even talk properly. That's what it comes down to. I plead, says Paul, to agree in the Lord.

Now I know it's sometimes very difficult. I know. I know that perhaps the fault lies with the other person. I know all that. I'm not saying it's easy. But I'm saying that we need to make it a matter of prayer.

And it's one thing being together. And isn't it wonderful to be together today? And isn't it wonderful all to be together worshipping the Lord?

[22 : 59] But let's make sure that it's a reality when we go out that door. Make sure that we are one, not just on a Sunday, but every day of the week that we are as active in the cause of Christ as the Lord would want us to be.

Secondly, the combination of different cultures is always a dangerous thing. Combination of different cultures.

You know, cultures are always clashing. Remember in Luke chapter 9 and verse 51 how Jesus tried to go through Samaria and the Samaritans refused to allow him and his disciples to go through their country.

And of course, one of the disciples said to Jesus, right, shall we call down fire and consume these Samaritans. You know, you see, there was this cultural prejudice arising.

And the truth was he hated the Samaritans. Just the same way as the Samaritans hated the Jews, the Jews hated the Samaritans. And even the followers of Christ found it difficult to learn to love the Samaritans.

[24 : 18] And, you know, in this group of people here in chapter two, there are all kinds of different people. Most of them were Jewish people, but as the church grew, as the church expanded, there were people from all kinds.

And even people who had been brought up as Jews, they had been brought up in different areas. Like, for example, there were the Greek speaking Jews and there were the Hebrew Jews, if you know what I mean.

people who had come from a Greek background, there were people who had come from the church.

And where there was a dispute, remember that the church in those days, they gave out food portions to the widows in those days.

And a complaint arose because the Greek widows, those who had come from a Greek background, were being neglected by the daily food distribution.

[25 : 24] And then the church had to react very quickly because there was a potential for disaster. What they did was they appointed seven deacons.

These were the first deacons. They got together and they asked one another, what should we do? And obviously they came to the conclusion, you know, it's a marvelous passage, a marvelous passage in prayerful common sense.

But it's also a marvelous passage because it's the first appointment of deacons within the church. And it also, it sets the scene for the church being a caring body, looking out for the needs of those within its bounds and outside its bounds.

But here's the point, that they appointed seven, I believe that they were prayerful in doing so, they appointed seven deacons, they chose them out, I believe they must have voted for them.

I don't have any hesitation in saying that at all, apparently the Greek word sort of could mean that they voted for them. So they selected, they chose out seven men who were full of the Holy Spirit, seven men they could have utter confidence in, and they left them the task of caring.

[26 : 35] Now it wasn't that a sensible decision, but here's the point. then we read that the decision they came to pleased the whole church.

So they were kept united. They were kept in one place, even against the danger of conflict in cultures.

But then thirdly, the combination of pride and conviction is also a dangerous one. pride and conviction.

Take the division, for example, that rose between Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapter 15 and verse 36. Paul had come back from his first missionary journey, and there had been a suggestion that they go out again on a second missionary journey, this time to strengthen the churches that they had seen established during the first missionary journey.

And Barnabas wanted to take the young man John Mark with him. Now, John Mark had abandoned the apostles and he had gone home.

[27 : 44] Presumably, things had got a bit rough for him and John Mark was a very nervous person, probably a very timid young man and he couldn't handle it. Now, Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance.

Paul said, no way. He's abandoned us, he's forsaken us once, he's likely to do it again, I'm not taking him with us. And the dispute rose and got worse and worse and there arose such a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that they ended up separate.

Now, there was no church separation, there was no split, there was no two denominations afterwards, and yet a dispute arose because of, I believe, a combination of conviction, both men were convicted about what their view was, but I believe that pride got the better of them and entered in.

And you know, it's very difficult to keep sinful human pride out of, even the convictions that we have. Now, I'm saying these three things because they're entirely relevant in the 21st century.

We need to be aware of our own sinfulness. We need to be aware that that sinfulness affects our relationships with other people. And we need to be aware of the value that my brother has to the Lord.

[29 : 08] He is a man or a woman who the Lord has died for. He's therefore my brother in the Lord, she's therefore my sister in the Lord, and I have to treat her and him as such.

That's the first thing. Whatever culture or background or intellect they come from, or however easy it is to get on with that person, and whatever my convictions are, I always have to take into account the view and the feeling of my fellow believer in the Lord.

Forewarned is forearmed, and I believe that these are the warnings that the Bible gives, and yet at the end of the day there are always going to be matters of dispute.

You know, that's why I love the Presbyterian system. I'm not trying to fly the flag, but we are a Presbyterian church, and I believe so much in Presbyterian. It doesn't always work as it should.

It sometimes goes wrong, but it's biblical. And on more than one occasion we read that the apostles appointed elders, and what were these elders? They were not lords over the church, but they were the government that Jesus entrusted to the church, to elders, in order to apply his word.

[30 : 35] You know, no elder, by the way, has a right to say, I'm going to rule this congregation the way I want to. That's not what an elder is there for at all. He's not there to make up the rules.

The rules are already there. It's in our hands. It's called the Bible. And the elder, the job that the elder has is to make sure that as far as lies within us, that we are a biblical church, which is to make sure that I preach the Bible, and to make sure that things are run as far as possible on a biblical level.

There are no bosses, there are no rulers, there are no dictators. I don't have any more power than any of my brethren here. When it comes to a vote, we can all talk, and sometimes we disagree over things.

That happens all. And yet, at the end of the day, we prayerfully vote on a decision to be taken. And when the vote is cast, it could be 2010, and the ten who voted for the other option have to fall in and prayerfully and meekly and humbly fall in with the rest.

And the real test of your Christ-likeness is when things don't go your way. And it's the same with all of us. It's the real test, is a test for our humility and to make sure that we work towards the good of the church.

[32 : 07] Unity and togetherness is not automatic. It's got to be worked out, and there's always a price to be paid. Whenever you get different people, you have different views and backgrounds and convictions.

Some of them are mature, some people are immature, some people are extrovert, some people are introvert, some people are loud and quiet, and yet here we are worshipping together in the one place, worshipping the same Lord.

And we can, if we go back to these words just in the closing few moments, what do we have? What can we take away this evening from just these few words?

They were all together in one place. First of all, they were together in their worship. Let's return to the reason of our being here this evening.

We're here to worship. And worship is hugely important to every believer. It's not just an exercise.

[33 : 14] It's not just a chore. It's something that we go to because we believe utterly in what we're doing. And whatever differences there may be between the way people want to worship, I believe that what we do here as a congregation is scriptural, and the real challenge that lies before us as a congregation is the intensity of our worship.

That's what God looks for, I believe. God is spirit, said Jesus, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. I believe that that's what God is looking for every Sunday and every Wednesday and Thursday and as often as we come together to sing his praises, to tell ourselves, to remind ourselves of what he has done for us, to listen to the Lord.

I will hear what God the Lord will speak to bring our requests before him, to come together in worship. I believe that what I want to emphasize to us as a congregation is the intensity or the spirituality, the eagerness, the fervency with which we worship.

Is it just a habit for us to come here on a Sunday? Or is it something that is a real highlight in our week? Is it something that happens at the end of the week that's tagged on to an otherwise busy and significant timetable and at the end of it we worship?

Or does it happen at the beginning of our week? Something that we start our week with because we believe in its vitality and its importance.

[34 : 58] We come to seek the face of God and come to meet with God and to hear his word, to join together in fellowship. How much does that mean to you? Is it something you wake up on a Sunday morning and you say, I'm so glad that it's Sunday.

I joined when to the house of God. Go up, they said to me. Is that, I know we don't always feel like that for various reasons. Perhaps we're tired, perhaps we've had a busy, stressful week, perhaps we're weighed down by all kinds of perplexities and things that have turned upside down in our lives.

I know all of that. And yet, yet you have to stop and you have to say all these things are in God's control. God will take care of all these things. I must go and worship him because he is everything to me.

He is what I live for. He is the Lord that has saved me, brought me out of darkness and into his marvelous light. And I'm going to give him the first place in my life.

Worship is exceedingly, exceedingly important. And I hear, I've been long enough in the world now as a Christian to have heard too many times people who complain.

[36 : 14] And sometimes there is substance in people's complaints. You know, people who say, well, I didn't get much out of that service. Perhaps there is some reason why you didn't get something out of that service.

Perhaps your complaint is maybe. Sometimes we don't always preach as we should do. Sometimes as preachers we don't always have a good Sunday. We perhaps feel tired or a headache or have felt ill or having to, all of these kind of things.

And perhaps, and yet, sometimes the problem is yours. You know, I believe that we live in a world where we're so accustomed to thinking of service providers that we think the church is a service provider.

So you walk in the door and you think, now what am I going to get from this? That's not worship at all. And I can guarantee you, if that's the way you come in that door, you'll go out as empty as you came in.

The church is not a service provider. It's the body of Jesus. You are part of that body of Christ. And it's not like you go into ASDA or you go into the Coop or you go into Tesco.

[37 : 26] And you know, for many people, this is the way that church is. They wake up on a Sunday morning and they think, now, which church will I go to today? What do I feel like doing?

It's like you go into Tesco and you normally buy Kellogg's Cornflakes and I think I'll have a change today. I'm going to go for Cheerios. that's the way the people treat church.

A consumer world in which you go to church just to get, I'm fed up of that place. I'm going to go to another place. You go there for a while and I'm fed up of that place and I'm going to go to another place.

That's a consumerist society. That's not the way the church was at all. God demands our commitment and loyalty. He commands us to be part of our fellowships.

An integral part, you know, perhaps you don't feel in a congregation this size as if you play much of a part. Let me assure you, you do. And I believe that you are part.

[38 : 35] You know, you take part in worship every time you come in. And when I lead in prayer the way we pray, I lead in prayer. It's not just me that's praying. You are taking part in that prayer.

So, 500 people tonight ought to have been praying for Eritrea. And that means God's going to answer that prayer. Not because 500 people pray and he wouldn't answer it if 400 people.

That's not the way it goes at all. But yet, and here I'm coming to the second point, yet something happens when God's people pray together.

I don't know what it is. I can't explain it, but it's in the Bible. And that's enough for me. When God's people pray, then, and that's the second thing I was going to say, the time's running out. They were together in prayer.

You know what I'm going to say, don't you? I've said it before. I say it humbly. And I say it with utter conviction that the healthy church is a praying church.

[39 : 36] I can't get away from it in the Bible. It's not a thing that the free church has dreamed up. It's not just because of tradition. It's because when I go back to the Bible, it's there in front of me.

Chapter 1, verse 14, Acts. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer. Chapter 1, verse 24, and they prayed.

Chapter 2, verse 42, they devoted themselves to the teaching, breaking bread, and prayer. Chapter 4, verse 24, when they prayed, the place where they were were shaken.

Chapter 6, verse 6, when choosing deacons, they prayed again. And so it goes on, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The biblical church is the praying church.

Now, I find great difficulty with a person who says to me, I don't think prayer meetings are important. And I'm thinking, let me go back to the Bible again.

[40 : 37] Just let me go back to Acts, just to make sure that I'm right. I'm not going back to the blue book or the free church rule book. There isn't one. I would just want to go back to the Bible.

And there it is in front of me. And I'm saying, what's wrong that I hear of people saying prayer meetings aren't important? I'll just leave it there.

Just leave it. because if God doesn't convict you, then I certainly can't. And then they were together in acquaintance. They knew each other. They loved each other.

They looked out for each other. They prayed for each other. They were in and out of each other's homes. They cared for each other. Same way as there used to be here at one time amongst Christians.

Used to happen naturally. Because there was real community amongst people, particularly amongst Christians, where they lived out their Christian life. I'm sure that there were faults and failures.

[41 : 36] But I hear stories of the rural communities, particularly in the old days. And I'm sure here as well, of Christians who demonstrated their love for one another. But it's a bit different now because our whole world has changed.

Do you know what we have to do? We have to create community. And that means that we have to deliberately make a point of knowing one another. There's no getting away from it.

We have to know one another. I believe that that's one of the great challenges that faces every congregation of God's people. I believe that we have to welcome one another, that we are invited to welcome one another.

And to know, to pray for one another. So please don't tell me that you're a spectator in church. There's always something for us to do for God and for his word and for the kingdom and for one another.

You look at the person who sits across from you, that person needs to be prayed for you. You might not even know their name. That person has their problems. They've got their headaches, their dilemmas.

[42 : 40] Maybe that person has huge issues. They're not just a face. It's a person who God has brought into this building to worship tonight. So don't just think of yourself.

we are a people who have been brought together to worship, to thank, to sing, to pray, and to be concerned with a deep, loving, lasting, Christ-like concern.

God has to come at a price. The price is your own obedience to the command of Jesus and the promise of Jesus that by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

let's pray. Father in heaven, we give thanks for your great goodness to us and we give thanks, Lord, that you have created as the produce of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the fruit of his work as the church.

And whilst we confess our own weaknesses and sinfulness in so many ways, we are glad to be together. We are glad for one another and we want to pray for one another and we want to ask that you will do great things amongst us because it was when your people were together and on that occasion that the Holy Spirit was poured out.

[44 : 24] We need to see the Holy Spirit being poured out upon our towns, our villages, our churches, not only here in Stornoway but all over the world this evening.

We ask, Lord, that you will bless our fellowship in Jesus and take away our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.