The power of reconciliation
discussion guide

based on Romans 5: 1 - 11 (Linked to sermon of 21/02/21)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

This is part of a series on Romans

Intro: In our last session we jumped forward to Romans 8 with its “expression of God’s unconditional love from which nothing can separate us.” This week we leaf through Romans 5, responding to the letter’s first mention of God’s love and Paul’s emphasis on reconciliation. As usual there are extra Bible references to explore, if desired, and suggestions to deepen our fellowship through discussion & sharing.

How does this week’s passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, and authentic community, during Lent, 2021?

Up (Go deeper with God):

“Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”
In Isaiah 43 God reassures a nation of his love, at a time when they are cut off from their homeland and special place of worship. The Paul Baloche song, “Same Love”, revisits these words. He ends with “You’re calling us to the cross,” - which is also a feature of Lent, and Romans chapter 5.

Begin by either reading Isaiah 43: 1-7; Or by listening to Paul Baloche’s “Same Love” on one of these links – https://youtu.be/qyfuKoC2kdU which comes with clearly printed words; whilst https://youtu.be/xAK3t6uG58Q is a more active performance that will keep you thinking.

Leave space for responses to the song or reading, including time spent in thanksgiving for the many ways in which God draws wandering humankind back into relationship.

Starter: Popular culture produces a steady supply of double acts and groups. Who comes to mind? What do you like about them? How might the stresses of performing occasionally effect their relationships?
Read Romans 5:1-11. Which phrases stand out for you & why?

Briefly review Paul’s line of thought in chapters 1 to 4. What key words or phrases could sum up the “story so far” for a new group member? Bibles with section headings, or the titles from our sermon series may help with this. Keep it simple.

Shifting gear: By chapter 5 Paul’s earlier language of the lawcourts - judgment, “justification” and “righteousness” - yields to imagery which appeals more to the heart. How do verses 1 & 2 signpost this new direction?

In verses 6-10 Paul keeps humanity’s separation from God in the mix. Which words indicate this? (The contrasts in these verses is a feature he develops in the rest of the chapter, with comparisons between Adam and Jesus. But today we stop at verse 11.)

Friends: Talk of being a friend of Jesus’ can sound presumptuous. In John’s gospel Jesus says, ”I no longer call you servants ... instead I call you friends”. Romans 5:6 says Jesus came ‘while we were still powerless’ to bring this change about. Verses 10 & 11 highlight “reconciliation” - in fact the Apostle boasts “we have now received” it.

A complex word: Reconciliation is a complex word which can happily be paraphrased as Changing an Enemy into a Friend. Re-read verses 10 & 11 allowing a moment or two to meditate on this theme. (Now, or later, read 2 Corinthians 5 verses 18 – 21 for a closely related thought). Who initiates the change from enemy to friend?

In what way does changing enemies to friends throw light on our stand “in grace”? (v2) How might it cause us to rejoice (or boast) in hope of the glory of God? (v2)

In (Grow closer to each other):

Heart Language: Verses 5-8 move Paul’s “heart language” firmly into the foreground. Re-Read these verses. Take a few moments to think about your own experience of God’s love. Give time, for those who are happy to do so, to share an experience (perhaps recently), when they have been particularly aware of God’s love at work in their lives.

Suffering: In verse 3 & 4 Paul talks about suffering, resilience, character, and hope. This “fellowship of suffering” appears to a common experience for New Testament Christians, as for the church down the ages. (See James 1: 2-4 & 2 Peter 5: 1-8.)

Allow space for people give their reactions to verses 3 & 4 and, if happy to do so, share a time when suffering has helped them grow in faith. Such stories can be very encouraging. A suitable response may be a prayer of thanks for God’s help, followed by prayers for each other, perhaps in small groups, over any trials, however small, that members are currently facing (in as far as people feel comfortable to share.)

Out (Reach further with the good news):

In 2 Cor 5 Paul speaks of God “entrusting us with the message of reconciliation.” This, along Romans 5:10 & 11, raises the question: How can we best communicate God’s reconciling love to those we know? This ‘entrusting’ naturally leads to prayer: firstly for anyone regards God as an enemy; secondly that we will recognise and take practical opportunities to be channels of God’s reconciling love wherever we go.