

# **New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**30th May 2021**

**Acts 4:32-37**

## **Welcome**

Hello. I'm Roddy Hamilton the minister in New Kilpatrick Parish Church and thanks for the invitation to join to you wherever you are and we know we are connecting with folk far and wide. It is the sense of being a global faith and church that sends tingles down my spine. What can make it quite exciting is recognising that in each of the places we have our own variations, customs, traditions and beliefs. Some see that as a danger, that we should be clearly similar and we've got creeds and statements of faith to do that.

Personally I find the diversity refreshing and life-giving. In the respect we have for these differences, we find a safe place to share lives of faith. In the way we allow different insights to compliment our own and vice versa, we have greater understanding and less space for prejudice and fear.

That is not always how we run our churches nor our communities but it is where the church began and where we might be able to begin again in these days of post-pandemic renewal. Let's journey.

## **Prayer**

Spirit of truth  
May we make space for you  
Here among us

A space for listening  
And playing  
A space for dancing  
And waiting  
A space for renewal  
And recreating

For we are ready for you  
Daring you  
To provoke us and kindle us  
Disrupt us and pacify us  
Challenge us and comfort us

And enrich our worship  
Through the broadening of our minds  
To encounter you  
In all your diversity  
And colour  
And imagination  
Holy Dove

May we find new words  
And old ones too  
New dreams  
And the oldest vision  
New songs  
And ancient ones too  
That unite us  
In time and place  
In faith and adventure  
In being a church in every age

Holy Spirit:  
Energy of heaven  
And community of love,  
May we ever be ready  
To live afresh  
As your community of faith  
In this place  
And every place  
This time  
And every time  
With all your saints  
And witness to the great 'I AM'  
Of the love of God  
Among us  
Between us  
And within us

Hear us as we share the global prayer  
Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed by thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever.  
Amen

## **Reading Intro**

When we speak of the early church, how do you picture it? We don't have a huge amount to go on. We have Acts which is the second part of the Gospel of Luke, both written by Luke who was around the early church and Paul and Peter. But it is one view of the church.

We have some of the letters of Paul. They aren't all written by Paul but some of them are and these are all responses to problems in the early church. We don't fully understand what the problems were because it is like hearing only one side of a conversation.

And there is a few mentions in early histories but they are all writing about something that wasn't fixed. You couldn't define what the early church was. It didn't have a set of beliefs, or rituals, or traditions. It was still Jewish though Judaism hadn't yet been invented as an orthodox faith either. There is no specific word in the bible for Judaism because it wasn't organised around beliefs and doctrines. According to Daniel Boyarin it wasn't until well into the 18C that the word Judaism as a set of beliefs was used in the way we use it today.

And there was no 'Christianity' as a defined religion. No word 'Christian' but rather known as 'The Way'. 'Christianity' was used as a slur. It was many generations before anything was defined as orthodox Christianity or Judaism. Up to then there was a lot of fuzziness. But there are stories in all the vagueness that we can see began to shape the future.

### **Reading Acts 2:32-37**

<sup>32</sup> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup> They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). <sup>37</sup> He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

### **Reflection**

Pentecost, the feast we celebrated last week, is possibly the most chaotic festival we have in our faith. Of course this is maybe just me, disorganised, last minute. But, despite that, pentecost often feels uniquely Christian, as it is the birthday of the church.

But of course it isn't uniquely Christian. Even the name doesn't belong to Christianity. It is a Jewish festival, 50 days after passover, commemorating the single most important event in Israel's history: the giving of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible to Moses at Sinai.

Our version of Pentecost happened on the day everyone was celebrating that very event. But what we do too often is let our version replace the older version such that we forget the older one.

The same can be said for Easter, Christmas, Harvest. None of these Christian festivals were originally ours. We've taken them, reimagined them, and, replaced the original with our own, and in doing so we have reduced the older stories they grew out of.

It is the way power works: simply replace what you don't want. It's our version of the Romans desecrating the Temple and destroying the artefacts; one system of thought destroying everything that reminded you of the previous version like removing alters and stained glass from our buildings in the reformation. It reduces what happened before.

And when we do that, we present a version of history, that suggests it was very clear when Christianity began: the resurrection is our defining moment and Pentecost the day the church began. But that is a history written by the victors.

For the first decades, the difference between Christianity and Judaism was difficult to see. There was no one line, no one version of Christianity or Judaism. Neither were faiths that were set in stone. They were originally, quite varied and flexible. The Temple in Jerusalem accepted all sorts of diverse expressions of Judaism. When it was destroyed there was nothing to hold all these expression together so a stricter version of orthodoxy was required and rabbinic Judaism developed the version we have now.

The same was true for Christianity, councils and creeds did the same. But these were many generations later. Up to that time there was a lot of variety of expressions and you would have had difficulty telling Christian and Jew apart. Some were Jesus following and others weren't, some quite antisemitic and other anti-Christian. Indeed the name Christianity was originally a slur.

And we've come to a version of history where we see Christianity replacing, superseded Judaism. The Old Testament and the New Testament makes one sound fresher and better than the other. Christianity is the child of Judaism and its successor. And that is a dangerous place to be for any religion, placing itself at the top of some ladder of evolution or, even worse, authority.

When you read the story we have today, of sharing abundantly in community, hospitality towards all, (just to note these words we constantly came across in our resurrection stories) the early church did not have a sense that it was the succession of anything. It didn't think itself as that at all, rather, in this story, it was founded on mutual respect, a place for everyone, a community where each person complimented each other, creating a diverse, generous group of people.

It is these gifts of community that offer a different way forward rather than the supersessionist version of religion, the power version of faith, the old and new versions that poison our history, our church, our communities. And as we grow from here, into whatever we will be as a church, and as a country, and when we witness the conflicts we generate between and within communities by forgetting, lessening and replacing the past, maybe we should turn more to this example of a community in the early church, and allow ourselves to grow into whatever that early model of faith found brought it life, in ancient values of any faith community: respecting each other traditions, complimenting rather than conflicting with each other, caring for one other.

That's not a beginning as if starting again. We don't need to start again. It is simply creating the richest, most generous place, to be honest about who we are, and find the life we have in the diversity of traditions we are.

## **Prayers for Others**

Loving Spirit  
Here is our world  
All of it  
most of which we do not hear about  
Or know about  
Or even concerned about  
But you are

May you lead us  
Towards those places  
Where your kingdom of compassion  
Hospitality  
Abundance  
Can be shared  
Generously

And let us begin here  
Where we are  
Creating your kingdom in this place  
A model for the world

So in the energy of your spirit  
We pray to be disturbed enough  
To change hunger into banquets  
We pray to be challenged enough  
To move conflict towards peace  
We pray to be provoked enough  
To grow fairness from inequality

Holy Spirit  
We name here what we know is unfair  
Not knowing how best to change it  
But knowing we should  
From vaccine inequality  
To abuse of power  
From prejudice towards different cultures  
Traditions, sexualities  
To fear of the same  
From tax rules that are weighted towards the rich  
And against those who create the wealth  
Spirit  
The vision of a faith community  
That shares  
That cares for the least  
That holds life and it's blessing in common  
We pray  
For this community we create here  
And for the world  
And the energy to move our words  
Into actions

And, Holy Spirit,  
For those within this community today  
Those we bring who are fragile  
Who need support and encouragement  
Who are seeking strength to get through crisis  
Of job loss,  
Of grief,  
Of coping with illness  
Our families and friends  
Our local community and neighbourhood

Hear us  
Hold us  
So be it  
Amen

### **Benediction**

May we live now  
Shaped by the spirit  
And led by her imagination and truth

And the grace...