

# New Kilpatrick

Sermon

19th March 2017

Luke 15:1-25

***Spirit... may we make room in the world for your imagination... your possibility... your creativity... and make room in us... to let it happen... So be it... Amen***

We've been watching the great painting challenge on a Sunday evening... the final is tonight and we are all very excited... It is just your typical reality TV format... where baking has been substituted with painting...

We're watching it because we like that format... clearly we're not a very exciting family... but more than anything... we have been watching it... because Shirley... my wife's old boss... is one of the contestants...

He's Jimmy... the one with the broad Greenockian accent... and generous use of colloquial greenockianisms... 'Ya dancer'... 'ye wee torag'... and the only person I know who can get away with saying... 'yer a wee darlin' to Mariella Fostrop... who with a name like that clearly isn't from Greenock...

It had been going quite well for Jimmy... up until last week... when he was... in his own words... dumped... commenting on how he was going to have to go back to Glasgow... and face the music from all these real artists he knew... "They'll be giving me pelters for daring to come onto a show like this"... he said...

It just crossed my mind that the thoughts of the prodigal... facing the prospect of home... was possibly thinking the same sort of thing... though with less good humour... Actually... perhaps the prodigal was anything but relaxed about his return from the big city... He had stepped out his home-life... rejected his traditional ways and the culture of his community... who expected him to at least wait for his fathers demise before he took his inheritance... Every rule you could break... he broke... not just the legal ones... but more significantly the cultural ones too...

He was the black sheep... the rotten tomato... the irritant who broke the family by ruining its standing and reputation... and thus... for all intents and purposes... according to the

older brother... should have just stayed with the pigs... because really... he wasn't welcome home...

And... to be honest... would not most of us find some sympathy with that... The popular vote of the elder brother... and the whole community... whose ancient rules and traditions had been broken by the antics of the son... would have the younger brother left with the pigs...

But thank God... for God... who in this story is represented by the father... and who recognises the way of the kingdom... is not to go simply with the popular vote... God... is not a populist... The kingdom of God is a far more balanced... mature... and representative...

Now... at the beginning of this week... I never dreamed that this well told... well known story of the lost son... would turn out to be so insightful... and speak into the gathering populist momentum of the west... other than perhaps Holland... who has kicked that trend into touch for a moment or two...

But with debates in both houses of parliament about having a meaningful parliamentary vote on Brexit... along with the quick change in National Insurance for the self employed... because of populist backlash from backbenchers... the dynamics of a family embroiled in what to do about the prodigal son... has much to say to us...

Perhaps you heard Lord Traverne speak in the debate in the Upper House... where he said that... only doing the 'will of the people'... means those who govern... are simply delegates who respond to the most popular... fashionable trends... It becomes a dictatorship of the majority... because delegates who just vote with the populists... are not being the checks and balances of a representative and mature democracy... where ideas by different groups are debated... evidence listened to... arguments given... and minorities heard... which then leads to shape the laws and values of a society... that is representative and stable...

This is called a representative democracy... where everyone has a **voice**... including minorities... and not just a vote...

Populism on the other hand... is only democratic for the majority... and is highly **undemocratic** for everyone else... where minorities have no representation... it becomes authoritarian democracy...

But wait a minute... how did we get to this point... We were only a few minutes ago telling a Sunday school story of a son who ran away... decided to return as a servant... and whose father says... no not as a servant... only as my son...

Well... lets look at this as the kingdom of God... The popular vote clearly is with the elder son... His younger brother... the bad apple... the fly in the ointment... the one who breaks all the cultural traditions of the community... the minority in the family of one... is not welcome...

But the father is the more mature corrective... who choses not to go with the will of the household... who recognises while the younger son has not chosen the best career path... accepting the son back into the family... while not popular... represents the kind of household the kingdom is about...

In this kingdom story... the father is the check and balance... who recognises the minorities... the outcasts... the lost... the ones who take a different route than the majority... and represents them and their value... as much as all those who have never left...

The father is God... and God is love... So love is the corrective... the balance... that represents and values the minority... the lost son... and gives him a place and a voice... despite the will of the household and the populism of the elder son...

Now... perhaps you can argue that is stretching the parable beyond what it was originally saying... Maybe... but the situation Jesus offers us in this parable... speaks of a kingdom ethic... that helps us reflect on this past week...

Here love... becomes the check and balance... the corrective... challenging the idea that only the implementation of the people's will is democratic... The Kingdom creates a society where the needs of minorities... are in balance with the needs of majorities... and creates a stable community because it is representative and inclusive of everyone...

In reading the parable this way... love is representative... It creates a mature community through the inclusion of all... such as our own ought to be... Faith seeks inclusivity... we do not ignore the needs of minorities... but take time to consider the evidence and the circumstances... seeing everyone with equal value... be they coming home... or be they the ones who have never left...

In this season that pushes us ever towards Holy Week... Jesus found... to his suffering and death... the kingdom of God was not the populist option... crucifixion was...

Faith is not populist... Sometimes it is a peculiar relief to know churches aren't full... for it doesn't peddle populism... It chooses the harder way of creating a just society by representing the needs of the least... and so the kingdom isn't easy... or fashionable... in a populist world...