

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

5th May 2018

Philippians 1:1-18

Spirit... may you shape our words... that they may be places where the kingdom is met... our silences... spaces to hear what others are saying... and our imaginations... the place where your inspiration is found... that encourages us to speak and listen more deeply... So be it... Amen

This is my own letter to you all... in the style of Paul... but genuinely meant... In writing this letter perhaps it might enable us to all hear what Paul is saying more clearly... and also hear his words for this congregation of New Kilpatrick...

Roddy... a minister of the church and servant of Jesus... To all the saints... in Christ Jesus... who are in New Kilpatrick... along with the elders and leaders... Grace to you... and peace from God the Creator and the Lord Jesus...

I thank God every time I think of you *all*... for the blessing you *all* are as partners in Christ... and it is to *all* that I write... for all of you are ministers of the Gospel... each in your own way... Not all of us have become teachers and ministers and elders...

I thank God for those who are the prophets among you... though you may not know you are... but those that disturb us and challenge us and continually draw us closer towards the gospel... questioning what we do... and connecting what we say... with how we ought to live in community... in our community... for you... I give thanks...

For those who dream dreams and share visions... both young and old... for our community here... as the Body of Christ... keeping us heading towards the future... and seeing it kingdom shaped... it is not an easy task to keep us focussed beyond where we are now... but for you... I give thanks...

For those whose lives are ones of compassion... finding every way to give of yourself... and take such time as it needs... to create here a place where justice is offered... where kindness is unconditional... and where anger is righteous... all of which helps shape the daily worship we offer... through the gift of ourselves we give to each other... I give thanks...

It is only right for me to speak of you all in this way... for these things you genuinely are... holding each other in your hearts... And this is my prayer... that such love... witnessed in so many ways... may overflow... with knowledge... imagination... enthusiasm for the gospel... but mostly love... to help us determine what is best... for ourselves and our community... and how God wishes us to be towards each other...

For in such ways... the Gospel truths are alive... and as we are God's people... let us work towards God's harvest... with a compassion that transforms our community through love... and reveals the gospel as real... for all those we share our lives with... and partner... in our community...

May we always begin such transformation in our worship... where we pray for the good of our neighbour... and support each other... that we might proclaim the gospel in our lives... for we all share the gospel... it is all our calling...

Indeed this is a *partnership* we share is it not?... This Gospel we proclaim... it is a communal and community activity... for no one can be a follower in isolation... but the love of Christ... is expressed most fully and most generously in love of neighbour...

This is key to the Christian life... especially in a world that focuses on individualism... and heads towards isolationism... creating barriers and exaggerating differences between us... The Good News of Jesus... is that love and grace and justice and life... are not individual possessions...

Our good news... our experience of God's grace... is not an individual possession... but the communal expression of God... in which we all participate... that brings... not salvation for the individual... but transformation to the world in which each of us lives... through the love we have for each other... for this is who we are called to be... God's agents that live by the Gospel... and in so doing... become God's agents that change the kind of relationships we have with our neighbours... and this the kind of community we live in... drawing it ever closer to the more authentic shape of the kingdom...

Perhaps it would only be right and proper... to write a pastoral letter directly to the session... and invite them pass on my good wishes... and hope to you all... after all they

care deeply for this congregation... and lead it wisely... but we are all partners in this gospel... each one playing our own role together... and so I write to *all* the saints in New Kilpatrick...

And you are very dear to me... more than you could know... for you have kept the great tradition of the faith... alive in this place... for many generations... It must feel as those brothers and sisters in Philippi felt... who were the first Christian Community in Europe... representing the bridge that spread the gospel into the continent...

Because of them... we are here today... They shared the good news... passed on the truth about the faith... and invited all... at that crossroads of empire... to hear and become partners in Christ...

And so have you... the legacy of almost a thousand years of faithful mission... a presence... left by all those who have journeyed through this place... from Paisleys monks... to reformation leaders... to those who planted so many daughter churches...

It has not always been easy... but you have found faith in difficult circumstances... And we will continue to have difficult times... no matter what age or generations...

The gospel is hard to hear today... more than in many eras past... yet you proclaim it... your prophets prophecy... your dreamers dream... your visionaries have vision... your faithful remain faithful... better shaped to face the future... to challenge us all... and call us to step into what is unknown... with faith and daring... with love and grace... believing it is there... in the unknown... God is waiting for us... for it has always been that way for you...

And for this I am an optimist... I am heartened by your faith... yet I think it may be deeper than that... Optimism may express a confidence that things will get better for the faithful... But you give more... I have witnessed a deep-seated living *hope*... that no matter what shape the future becomes... God... in love... will work with us towards good...

So our hope... is beyond our immediate circumstances... beyond our individual selves... beyond even this single congregation... It is a hope for the future... where our whole

community is transformed... by the love of God... in which we share... for which you have a passion.. and through which we are partners...

How we maintain such confidence in the face of a changing world... and how we continue to search for peace as our world grows ever more turbulent... and how we maintain the gospel's compassion in our communities... resonates with us all... and this is the reason I write to you all... because you have a faith that continues to grow here... a grace that ever makes you share generously with our neighbours here... and you have the love that dares speak and live the word with greater boldness and enthusiasm...

And in that I rejoice... and so I thank God for you all... for the blessing you are... and the partners you have become in Christ Jesus...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you...