

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Luke 5:17-26

24th March 2019

Spirit... may words become acts... and acts become the kingdom... in everything we say and do here... and may we take the moment of inspiration you bring... into the world... and recreate it in word and act... So be it... Amen

It clearly was a sign of things to come... On Thursday evening... Scotland lost to 117th ranked Kazakhstan in the Euro 2020 qualifiers... so if that wasn't an omen... I don't know what is... Though... even with *that* loss... they may be staying in Europe longer than the rest of us...

But despite this being one of the most abject defeats in Scottish football history apparently... it actually might turn out to have been this weeks *good* news... because even the most enthusiastic sages have long given up making predictions... on what events we might share in the days to come... as the book has not yet been written on the bewildering political consternation the next days will reveal...

We're certainly scunnered and engaged in equal measure... with a situation that has come down basically... to how we trust each other... PMs and MPs... EU and UK... parties within parties... voters and political classes...

So to save us all... let us ground ourselves for the coming days... in a story we grew up with... which we have known from our earliest days in Sunday School... It will be good to be on familiar ground again...

But... spoiler alert... This is the bible... Familiar ground often shifts under our feet when we think we've got the handle of something... so with that in mind...

Here is Jesus... buried in the midst of a crowd... in the midst of a house... in the midst of a village... He's got a reputation now... and these are heady days for him and the disciples... He is attracting a diverse crowd... some who seek to be healed... some who seek to listen... some who seek to conspire against his politics of the kingdom... to trip him up... and reveal him for the weak prophet he is... Thus it has ever been...

But that is not what this story is about... that's just wallpaper... It is actually about a bundle of friends... one among them paralysed... who have the idea to try out Jesus reputation for healing... only to find... when they get to the village... his reputation is such the house is so crowded inside... there is no way of getting close... But with a mix of imagination and determination... (a gospel imperative)... they find the outside stairs... climb them... all this time heaving their friend along with them... and end up on the roof...

Once there... out come the penknives... or sharp sticks... or perhaps just hands... as together... they work to peel away the roof covering...

Meanwhile... we can only imagine what is going on down below in the house itself... Jesus constantly interrupted by plumes of dust... falling from the ceiling... and that strange scratching noise... as the friends find a way into the house...

And when the hole is big enough... they tie their friend's bed with the rope they have handily brought with them... and lower him down... right at the feet of the carpenter...

And Jesus sees him... and in front of the crowded room... performs that miracle those companions sought... Jesus says... 'Friend'...

Did you miss it... It's right there... in the word... 'Friend'...

Of course... we're too easily distracted by the more dramatic elements... which we think ought to be involved in a miracle... The roof being torn apart... the bed being lowered... the forgiveness of sins... and most dramatic of all... the taking up of the bed... and walking clean out of that house... as the crowds part... choking on the silence that comes instead of words... at the audacity of Jesus...

But these aren't the miracle... Not really... The bit... that changes the balance of things... is the first word Jesus says to the one who will eventually pick up their bed... 'Friend'...

While the person is still paralysed... while still a sinner... with that word... Jesus brings the whole circle of the community around the paralysed one again... Jesus hands back honour... hands back inclusion... hands back a place of belonging... which had all been

withdrawn... because illness and disease were the work of sin... and turned you into an outcast...

But Jesus places the paralysed one back into the social circle of the village again... because the word 'friend'... is inclusive... welcoming... levelling... miraculous...

And as the theologians among them flounder... and struggle to find their feet again... Jesus pre-empts their incredulity... with his usual response of a question... "Which is easier'... he asks... 'to say... 'Your sins are forgiven'... or to say... 'Stand up... take up your bed... and walk?'...

Well in truth... neither of them are particularly easier than the other... both are fairly impossible... but as soon as we get into that debate... by the time we imagine that discussion is something of importance... talking about authority and cause and effect... we've missed the miracle completely... because that happened when Jesus called the person 'friend'... for that is when the whole balance of relationships shifted...

That's the moment we moved away from the forgiveness of sins... which the church has in the past been quite precious about having authority for... and away from a relationship where healing is given out to some... again where the church imagines it has some special gift... and instead becomes a relationship based on the gospel that says... you belong... and you are beloved... just as you are...

Now clearly... none of that is particularly dramatic... and nor is it new... It has been said a million times over... this radical inclusion of Jesus... an insight all of us first heard when we first heard this story...

But perhaps being reminded of that truth... sits as an antidote to BREXIT... which regardless of how it ends up... has fuelled a deterioration in our relationships... with a crisis-driven lack of trust in others... that continually moves us apart...

We don't need to live like that... We don't need to model our behaviour on the way negotiations have been going... or need to agree with the things said about politicians by some of their own... or the way our parliament has at times behaved towards each

other... nor the threats made to our members of parliament or originator of petitions... and minority groups in our communities that have increased since Brexit...

We can chose a different way... and model something quite different... found in the word this story models... the word that recognises... honours... gives a place to others... *philia*... the greek word for brotherly and sisterly love...

It's a choice about how we decided to see and treat and honour each other in the world... and in our communities... and in our parish here... As a congregation... in every group and every event... from guilds to festivals... sessions to coffee pot... we choose to see each other... as a person who **belongs**... who has honour... who is **beloved**... **just as they are**... male-female... gay-straight... muslim-sikh... autistic-bipolar... (remember none of us are 'normal'... we've all got some reason to be lowered down from that roof)... for that is truly the miracle in this story... hidden in plain sight among all the drama... in a story of brotherly-sisterly love...

It's one of the first stories we learned as children... but given the shape of the next couple of weeks... perhaps it is a story that has come of age... as we might too... as we choose how we want to treat... trade and trust each other... in the years to come...