

# New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Numbers 14:1-12

4th November 2018

***Spirit... inspirer... dreamer... vision-crafter... word-catcher... faith-shaper... may you be these gifts to us... in our place here... for this time now... that we might see beyond ourselves... and who we are yet to be... So be it... Amen...***

The US midterm elections are coming up on Tuesday... which have nothing to do with us... but we are... fascinated by the machinations of US politics at the moment... because they offer an illustration... magnified... of the dynamics... and dysfunction... of a nation falling out with itself...

We're doing that too of course... but sometimes when you are in the midst of it... you don't see it so clearly... but leaving Europe is the constant "go-to" conversation whenever we run dry of talking about the weather...

Everyone feels like they have fallen out with everyone else... On the one extreme... O that we were back in Europe... at least we knew where we were... and the other... the wilderness looms but it is better than the forest of European law...

And in both instances... many of us sit equally fascinated and scared... of the tweets and headlines and soundbites and backstops that shape the conversations... Has it ever been like this before?...

O yes... In fact so long has it been going on... it goes back to the Bible... God's People constantly falling out with God... O that we were back in Egypt... We were better off back when we were slaves... Indeed the people found themselves in the wilderness so long... because they complained... God had no intention of letting the moaners tarnish the land of milk and honey... so it was only when the next generation grew up... the promised land was open for business...

However all this complaining wasn't one sided... O no... God was every bit as petulant as the people... took the huff... said 'I'm not playing any more'... and Moses was caught in the middle... his head buried in his hands... wondering how on earth he got involved with this... Brexit would be easier...

This is the story of a God and God's People learning to live in relationship... It was new for both... and both were finding it difficult... For a future relationship... Two things are going to have to happen...

One... there is going to be a lot of letting go... a lot of grieving over what felt better in the past... but wasn't working now... Even the slavery they had just been freed from... felt better... than this wilderness they were standing in...

And two... it was going to be the next generation that was going to gain from it... During the wilderness years... this present generation were going to have to live more faithfully than they had ever done before... and invest their promised land in their children...

And these were hard lessons then... and hard lessons now... However they shape a faith... that makes space to grow... where we let go what has defined us in the past... and make space for what our story is yet to be... but often... we are caught in the middle... looking both ways...

But the truth is... every generation finds themselves in that liminal place... for faith does not allow us to settle down... Every generation has to let go something important to them... so that they can invest their *greater* hopes... in what they cannot yet see...

At least that seems to be the kind of stories the Bible offers... to resource and guide our continuing life of faith...

But there is a third thing... vision... The dream of a land of milk and honey... a vision of a place where all our investments... grieving... hoping... is worthwhile and leads us to... and it isn't circumstance that brings us to this place... It is a choice... a faithful choice... to choose to shape what is still to be...

In our own congregation... we have generations that have steadily make such a choice... a congregation in a parish 370 years almost... Each generation has let go... so that the next generation finds life... who in turn let go... in order to let grow the next...

The example is this building... The quickest look tells us clearly it has not been static... The church obviously is far, far more than stone and stained glass... its organisations

birthed and let go... the topics talked about but don't now... the subjects preached and the language used different now... the ways we have been in the world... done differently now...

And each generations has been caught between what we need to let go... Egypt... and what we need to let grow... Promised Land...

In that creative space... last week... the session agreed... to deliberately engage with that liminal space... looking back and forward... and refocus our work and our faith... into two significant priorities... that will help us make choices of what to let go... and let grow...

One is being loved by God... and the other is Loving neighbour... We had originally talked about the priorities as Love God... and Love Neighbour... but as one elder rightly pointed out... Love God is not meant to be a command... We are loved by God... unconditionally... Given that is true... we respond to that affirmation... loved by God... to love our neighbour...

And so we have changed our committee structure... to two central groups... Loved by God... where we explore faith... wonder about worship... engage with learning...

And loving neighbour... where we turn outward... and respond to our parish needs... in partnership with others...

It is a vision of the church... one that is focussed on relationships... with God firstly... that challenging relationship... allowing God to question us... and us to question God... never taking the faith for granted... letting the questions of our faith... shape who we are... reinterpret for this age the stories of our faith in Sunday School and as adults... imagining how this place of prayer and relationship with God can better be a place of relationship with others...

And in loving neighbour... shaping the activities... the outreach of the church... round the needs of the parish... finding new partnerships... changing the relationships we have with others... by giving away our love... our faith... our stories... becoming agents that transform the community... through the relationships we have with it...

And the session have agreed it is important enough to employ a resource person... to work with the outreach of the church... while the minister... focusses again on the growing of faith... so we clearly prioritise our vision... to affirm we are loved by God... and because we are loved ... we respond by loving our neighbours...

That new resource worker is Trish Robertson... an elder here... who will resource the Outreach team... while myself will resource the faith team...

Along with that... we will have a Campus team... and a finance team... both of which will care for all the physical assets within our buildings and the buildings themselves... asking how best to use and shape these physical resources to respond to our faith needs and our community needs...

These main groups... will create task groups... each specifically charged... with a project or action... because we have learned people don't join things for life... they still volunteer but for a specific thing... and for a specific length of time... so we will enable that... Faith group and Outreach group... enabling more people across the whole congregation to be involved in a variety of old and new projects... enabling the gifts we all have... to creatively live our faith... and love our neighbour...

It will take time to bed down... It will take time to see the results of this... but it is an honest recognition of where we are at the moment... a church... nationally in the wilderness... and locally very much alive to the future...

We have been exploring and discussing in our discussion groups... session and worship... what does it mean to be church today... This is the first step-change in that...

It is a pattern we follow from past generations... who never knew us... but believed in a parish they would never see as it is now... and for us too... to repeat that pattern... believing into the next generation's future... who will probably be a whole lot smaller... and need a different kind of faith community from what we are used to... We will not see it... but ours is to invite it to happen... prepare the ground... in challenged by each other... and by God... as we continue to live towards the land of promise... not yet fulfilled...