**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**20th February 2022**

**Luke 6:27-38**

**Gathering**

We seem to live on the brink of things at the moment… of war mongering… of pushing one side to see how far they will go… of brinkmanship…

It is our lowest from of relationship… when you see folk, not just as enemy, but worth provoking, simply to see how they will play…

Global headlines illustrate this, but we do it regularly in parliament, and in the church, in our communities, families even.

But there is a word that cuts across that, a holy word, that is uneasy in the world, and subverts our easy norms.

Today we speak it.

**Welcome**

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and once more, thank you for your invitation to join together again in worship.

Over the last few weeks, we’ve found ourselves in different places, synagogues, beachside, plains and heard Jesus preach almost the same message: freedom to the oppressed, good news to the poor, sight to the blind. Listen, repeat.

Today, we are still on that plain, just moments after Jesus has blessed the poor and cursed the rich. And if that was hard to hear, it doesn’t get a lot better. Loving enemies, turning the other cheek, handing over not just your coat, but your inner garment too.

From all those dreams and vision of what the kingdom will be like, now comes the nitty gritty… Would you like to turn over to another channel, or intrigued enough to see what Jesus has to say?

**Prayer**

Creating God

May we anticipate good

May we live expecting the right thing to happen

May we live as people of hope

Who see the best in folk

And shape our community here

In such generosity

May we let go

The anger that hurts others

The pain that fear brings

May we lay down

A hatred of the other

Because of difference

And a culture that tells us to turn away

Because of history

Or gender

Or prejudice

And in the middle of these

Between the generosity of life

And the making of enemies

May we turn towards the hurt

Be they foe or friend

May we turn towards the broken

Be they least or most

May we turn towards the rejected

Be they enemy or companion

In love

Loving God

May our religion

Turn folk into friends

Rather than enemies

May our faith be open and generous

Towards the least

And may our beliefs

Never prejudice us, warn us, or turn us away from

Those we have been told are ‘other than us’

For when you weep, O God,

In the twisting of our religion

All heaven breaks

And may we weep with you

Hear us

As we say the global prayer together

Our Father, who is in heaven

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your 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.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, the power

And the glory, forever

Amen

**Scripture Introduction**

The words we will hear Jesus speak about love and enemies will be some of his most familiar. We have spoken them frequently, but when you hear them in our own context they sound quite different from their original. Perhaps they are universal but only in intent. How we live them out is the difficult question.

Today, Christianity and Christians probably in the majority, have access to political power, we vote, we can be elected, we can organise community protests, as people of faith - unlike Jesus, or the Jewish community. Jesus social context in which he said these words is not our own.

How you hear these words of Jesus are different now from then where these were acts of non-violent peaceful protest at a system that kept people in their place. The literal approach is not so useful to us now as the context is very different.

when Jesus talks of turning the other cheek you have to place yourself in the culture of that time. A slave owner would humiliate his or her slave with a backhanded slap with his or her righth and across the right cheek of the slave.

Turning the other cheek, offering your left cheek, means the slave owner cannot use the right, dominant hand, but has to use the left hand, the one that is used for lesser things, that is culturally dirty. Thus turning the other cheek is about seizing the moral initiative, take control of the power dynamic. It is saying, “your action cannot humiliate me, but it can humiliate you”.

In other words, Jesus was initiating a countercultural community that sought to change systems with non violence.

Thus the ethic to love enemies, is not to just accept things, but to turn the tables of hatred with love. So when we hear of folk who are abused, there is nothing here that says that should not be called out. Or people caught in systemic prejudice, or misogyny, there is nothing here that says we should not enable folk to take control of the abuse of power.

The love ethic as Jesus shows it in turning the other cheek, is an example of turning the tables on the enemy, calling them out, and offering another way to live.

In listening to these words of Jesus we need to put down a marker that says love does not make us doormats, and loving our enemies does not invite us to love silence when we should speak out. These words have in the past done just that. But how these examples of Jesus serve us is to invite a way of uncrusting the hardened ways, of responding with hatred and revenge, and show a more moral way of rebalancing relationships, meeting force with ridicule.

**Reading: Luke 6:27-38**

**Reflection**

What we have read today, is such an iconic passage, yet such a high ideal: love your enemy.

In some way it is surprising it is there in the bible because it is such a pluralistic book, and as many times as you hear the phrase love your enemy, you will hear 3 times more stories and reports of religious violence towards others.

It is only a few sentences after the Good book begins that Cain and Abel fall out and one is murdered.

A single breath thereafter we hear how the world is filled with violence and God, who has hardly had long enough to grow a beard, almost abandons everything with the worst line in the bible: God regretted that humanity had been made and God’s heart was filled with pain.”

That kind of stops you in your tracks. God regrets making us.

Of course, we grow up from there. The rest of the history of the bible tells the story of humanity growing wiser and more mature enough that such phrases as ‘love your enemy’ become part of our language, and morality, and even system of rules.

Yet we live a double life, longing for that to be true but experiencing the very opposite.

Religion has a terrible history, of killing in the name of God, of prejudice in the name of God, of rejection, slavery, apartheid, in the name of God.

And in amongst all the loudest prejudices, excuses and enemies religion chooses to name, God can hardly be heard saying, “Do not use my name for that”

But there are places in the Bible, and they are still more memorable, that still offers a word that cuts across such hurt: “love your enemy”, ‘turn the other cheek”, “give to the one who takes your coat, your garment also”.

Now, we can explore each other these individually, and perhaps we should, but sometimes we lose the bigger picture when we argue of the details.

What Jesus is doing here, is change the way we do relationships. Jesus is breaking down the ways we define people in our society when we place them in a clan or caste or socio-economic group and define them from there.

He is opening up the fissure that has been there for generations, the gap between us that tradition and culture and wealth and empire have created, and offers us a way to expose the injustice of our relationships, non-violently.

What Jesus offers is not rules. These are examples, not legislative acts. It is a message that there is no room in the kingdom for tribal or cultural, or economic barriers.

The idea of loving your enemy is a powerfully ambitious ethic. Behind it is a very simple idea your enemy is also a human being. A decent society is one where enemies do not allow their fear or hatred of each other be their own undoing. And that undoing has been witnessed often in the history of the world, and is happening even now.

When we enshrine hatred, fear, towards a group of people, refugees, another religion, someone of a different sexuality, a political party, which is what populism willingly and readily does, when we concentrate hate towards a particular group, and we all unite against some group, society becomes less, as does our humanity, as does our God.

When we are held captive by such anger or hatred, some enemy, we remain captive. This is not freedom. Those who let their enemies define them, are not free.

What we can be instead, and what we always work towards in this place, and what Jesus is offering here, is to be the love in the hatred, the sanctuary in the pogrom, the place where we seek to rebalance our relationships, and present the possibility of a way of life defined around the virtues of love, grace and reconciliation. Put simply, what Jesus is inviting us to do is see people as God sees people.

**Questions**

What labels do we hold, and language do we use, everyday, that puts people down?

What labels do we hold, and language do we use in our faith, that puts people down?

What view of children, gender, older generations are we called to let go in order to let people live more freely?

How might we “turn the other cheek” and such like when we do not have those particular cultural encounters today?

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

May we draw the world here

And find ourselves

The folk called to love our enemy

In the middle of conflict

May we be the folk you long for us to be

And in doing so

Offer light to the world

Kindle peace in conflict

Shape sanctuary amid prejudice

Yet, Loving God,

May we move away from one size fits all

Supposing this way of loving

Of turning the other cheek

Of giving not just our outer garment but inner one also

Means we become doormats to abuse

And oppression

And structural prejudice

Loving God

May we live in the freedom love brings to us all

The sense that we are set up *against* war and conflict

That we define ourselves not by who our enemies are

But how we live towards them

And so we place here

In the heart of our prayer

The pantomime of might

Where Ukraine is caught in the middle

The fear leaders have

Who create conflict

And care not for the people between them

In Syria, Yemen, Tigray

For populism

That creates an enemy out of a minority

And gathers fear and hatred around them

Such as refugees, mental health, the poor

For a misogyny

That is still ingrained in our language

Our society

Our religion

That appears so hard to change

In all these ways, O God

May we turn the other cheek

Draw attention to the injustice

For the sake of the kingdom

And in that place reshaped by a love

And create a place for all

And a right living for all

Where we can bring our families and friends

The least and the lost

Those ill physically and mentally

Those in crisis and worried and fearful of the future

Nd prayer for them

Love them

Be companions with them

Loving God

In love hear us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**