**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**1st November 2020**

**Matthew 23:1-12**

**Welcome**

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton… the minister in New Kilpatrick… and thank you again… for the invitation to join you… in a time of pausing and reflecting… taking a passage from the bible… and seeing where it takes us in our world today…

From wherever you are connecting today… your computer screen… mobile… phone… smart speaker… thank you for letting us in…

Today… to be honest… I’m fighting the attraction of hiding my head in the sand… or going into my own personal state of lockdown… Its that feeling of helplessness at the moment… when you look at things… and witness the use and abuse of power that is constantly polarising us… from school meals to lockdown tiers… from three months protests in Belarus to US elections… and a frightening number of other examples… that make us feel fragile and anxious…

Into that… steps Jesus… with words about power… about relationships… and they probably spare none of us… so let us gather… that we might bring such words into our world… and stir…

**Gathering Prayer**

Loving God

Be among us in grace

And truth

And a love that holds all we are

That we might be here

And know a compassion

That calls us

Forgiveness us

Renews us

And sets us free again

Be among us in peace

And peace that fills us

With hope again

That speaks into a future

That is possible and positive

Filled with the kingdom’s gifts

That forgives us

Renews us

And sets us free once more

Be among us with patience

And e reorientate ourselves

Once more

Towards the light you bring

That holds us

In a place where we can see again

Who you are

To each of us

And who we are

To you

Forgiven

Renewed

And set free

Hear us

As we say the Lord’s Prayer

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.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power,

and the glory for ever. Amen

**Scripture Introduction**

Context is important… It is important in everything especially in today’s world where so many words are taken out of context and often used to say or support the opposite of what was originally intended…

That’s no different in the gospels… We’re going to hear from Matthew’s gospel in a moment… It contains some angry words against the Pharisees… Nothing new there… but remember this passage was written after the terrible fall of Jerusalem… the holy seat of God… and the destruction of the temple…

That is quite a mind-blowing event for those who believed God was all powerful… and the communities were trying to understand what led to this happening… What did all this mean…

Does that sound in any way familiar?

What was to blame for this… and so lots of people were added to that list… Familiar again?…

In amongst all this… Matthews wee community… freshly Christian but yet still discovering what that means… tucked into the life of the city of Antioch… and all the mess of the bigger picture… were trying to define its place… how it was to ‘be’ in the world… and these words were written to help…

**Bible Reading: Matthew 23:1-12**

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat;

therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it;

but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear,

and lay them on the shoulders of others;

but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.

They do all their deeds to be seen by others;

for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

They love to have the place of honour at banquets

and the best seats in the synagogues,

and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,

and to have people call them rabbi.

But you are not to be called rabbi,

for you have one teacher, and you are all students.

And call no one your father on earth,

for you have one Father—the one in heaven.

Nor are you to be called instructors,

for you have one instructor, the Messiah.

The greatest among you will be your servant.

All who exalt themselves will be humbled,

and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

**Reflection**

I have an old cartoon version of the Bible… It was my dads… I used it… and my daughter has used it… and I prefer this version because… in the pictures… I can actually see who is speaking and who is listening… and none of them is me…

I look at the cartoons… and I see Jesus speaking to the Pharisees and I think… that’s okay… they don’t look like me… I amn’t there… You see the events… from a distance… all third person… you and they…

But, sadly… the muse who inspired gospel writers to record their experiences… did not do cartoons… So when we hear it being read… we are probably meant to recognise ourselves. Not that we find ourselves doing that all that often… We’ve taken refuge… protection almost… in the distance between then and now…

Maybe we can hide behind terms like pharisees and scribes… and breathe a sigh of relief… and say… I’m not them… but the bible invites us to be a little more daring… and honest… and it doesn’t take much to strip away the names… and find ourselves right there… Jesus staring at you… “do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach”…

O that’s hurts… You see… the bible isn’t so much a his-tory book… its a my-story book… To read it properly… you really ought to be able to hear all this stuff… directed to each of us where we are… “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them”…

When do we hear it like that… the bible lives again… in this world…

And such words as these today… hit the mark once more… Such works speak into the polarisation and divisions in our communities and nations today… the “we’re better” “we’re first”… the exceptionalism of how we talk and respond to things…

There have been many examples of that recently… A world-beating Track and Trace system for example… It just needs to be one that works… but it’s the latent exceptionalism that is buried in such descriptions… It was hyperbole based on a nostalgic way of thinking about ourselves…

It comes from a way of seeing the world where there is a whole system that keeps some downtrodden… And of course… America First, exactly the same… vaccine races… exactly the same… trade wars and Brexit… exactly the same…

Jesus it taking on that power structure… and unravels it… offering instead the kingdom way which is all about equality…

So when we hear these passages… and we dare find ourselves in them… we have to swallow hard and take the knock… This gospel is not going to keep those in power comfortable… or at least it shouldn’t… but we are quite good at corrupting the truth of the gospel to suit ourselves…

So perhaps the way to respond to this passage is firstly with humility… stand there ourselves as individuals, family members, bosses and managers… and especially as churches… and listen and hear Jesus words, not to the Pharisees, but to us…

And hear not just a debate… but an invitation… about how we can rebuild after this pandemic… with a different kind of dynamic: not world beating but kingdom growing… not over others, but with others…

Jesus is saying… something has gone wrong… The pharisees were the good guys generally, but the power changed them… and the kingdom is calling us back, all of us… who hear ourselves in this, to an equal community, where the greatest is the servant… and let the lesson of humility… reshape our relationships, neighbourhoods and our congregations…

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

Beyond our walls

Computer screens

Newspapers

Social media

God found in the world

In coffee plantations

And garment factories

In banana fields

And nail bars

God found in all the places

Where we lay burdens

On the shoulders of others

Hear us pray

And when you hear our words

O God

Challenge us with the world

The relationships

The decisions we make

Convict us

With the weight of the kingdom

God of justice

May our prayers

Be less about words

And more about living

Less poetry

And more justice

So in our living now

In different lockdowns

And growing cases of covid

May we chose humility

For the sake of another’s life

In our nations and communities

As the virus exposes

More and more the least among us

And a society that has made the least

The most vulnerable

And revealed a way of politics

That cannot handle that truth

May we find humility

Our greatest gift

And as our future as a nation

Is negotiated

And as power balances

Shift

And as we find a world

More ready to blame those least like us

For our tarnish morals

May we find humility

Our greatest gift

And in our own families

And am one our friends and neighbours

Among those who are ill

And lonely and vulnerable

Those who cannot meet

And those worried

Those who grieve

But cannot fully do so yet

May we find humility

A place filled with compassion

And begin there

To shape tomorrow

And each day after that

In your name

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**

My friends

Go in peace

And live in it

And share it

Generously

And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Love of God

And the Commonwealth of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all

Evermore

**Announcements**

Hopefully we’ve found time together, from our distances that don’t feel that distant as we read the same passages, prayer the same words and reflect together. Of course, you do know that whenever is said here, is just one point of view and there are as many others out there as there are people. In fact there are probably more.

You are invited to bring all those experiences together online in our Zoom events. You’ll find these at [nkchurch.org.uk](http://nkchurch.org.uk). Our harvest appeal is finishing now but we are moving towards Remembrance next weekend and a special service shaped by a number of folk in the congregation who met this week to explore.

If you are listening to this on Sunday 1st of November then we have a special service on Zoom at 7.30 for All Saints Day where we spend time together reflecting on those we have lost and because of the pandemic we have been unable to celebrate their lives as we typically would. You are always welcome to join us.

Thank you to Liz James for reading today and we all hope to catch up with each other next time. Take care, keep safe. See you soon.