**New Kilpatrick**

**9th January 2022**

**Podcast**

**Luke 3:15-22**

**Welcome**

Hello, and happy new year to you all. I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for the invitation to join you today. We’re beginning the story again and we are at the Jordan with John the Baptist and crowds of onlookers from the temple, and even bigger crowds of people who are wanting cut loose from the temple. When through the crowd comes Jesus, the one John the Baptist says he point to. He is the signpost, the guide, the indicator…

**Prayer**

Loving God

In these days of new year

And the turning of the light

Beginning to stretch

May we have hearts that recognise

Such kingdom signs

Word spoken

Peace caught

Hope kindled

Clues and possibilities

That encourage our words

Enliven our belief

Nourish our faith

Loving God

Companion in life

And creator of our days

In this day

May our eyes of faith

Follow the hope

Hear the word

Feel the call

And journey again

Trusting tomorrow

Because of yesterday

May all your people

Feel that word of life

Flowing through all existence

Living

Breathing

Sustaining

Upholding us all

Loving God

Found in our everyday

May we still see

Still trust

Still hope

In you

And the whisper between us

That love is born

And the rumour among us

You are one of us

And the belief between us

We have a journey to travel

And we will travel

With you

Bound by the love

That never lets us go

Hear us

As we share the global prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed by thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy 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 thine is the kingdom, the power

And the glory, forever

Amen

**Scripture Background**

Today is the Sunday, every year we reflect on Jesus baptism, and we are so used to images of this episode we forget a whole lot of things. There is quite a plethora of images involved: fire, heaven, doves, God’s voice. It all suggests Luke, the writer, is having difficulty finding the language to use to describe who Jesus is. It’s a muddle of quite strong imagery.

Here’s someone who the story emphasises is a peasant, and ex-refugee etc and the anointing of this person, this God-person, is not in the temple or palace or even public square, but out here in the wilderness. If we don’t pick up on that enigma right at the beginning of Jesus’ story, then we never will, and we will miss the topsy-turvy, revolutionary, tradition-shattering kind of God this is.

Grace is not handed out through the system of power, or status, but here in the desert among the one’s fed up with temple power and work against that world’s version of authority. The signs are startling. This is going to be a wild ride.

**Scripture Reading**

**15**As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, **16**John answered all of them by saying, “I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. 19 But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

21 Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Video Intro**

Jesus, in baptism becomes part of the beloved community. Now his ministry begins, a different kind of ministry, founded on different values from those who came to watch from the religious authorities. A ministry inclusive of all those who had come out here to the wilderness, who had turned their back on the temple religion, which they experienced as unjust, oppressive, limiting. This baptism into the beloved community was a different way of thinking and experiencing love, justice, truth. Martin Luther King speaks of this when he says: “Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the ‘fight with fire’ method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that.”

**Reflection**

Luke offers very little detail in the story of Jesus baptism… He has John the Baptist shift all the fingers pointing to him… onto Jesus… and that… simply sums up everything we are…

As a church… and especially as a congregation, all we do is point… we are simply a signpost to what is beyond us… we model it here… we talk of it here… we hope in it here… we live it here… but we are always pointing beyond ourselves… to who Jesus will be… to what love will renew and reshape… that is our task… We point to Jesus… and we do it as a whole community…

As we have begun hearing… and will hear much more about… the national church is restructuring how we will be the church in the very near future… and it will affect us all… large and small… We don’t have the resources to be the church we once were… But that is not something to regret… It is an opportunity for new energy in the church… so that we might continue… in contemporary ways… to point to the one we follow…

What I don’t enjoy about these shifts… is all the administration of getting there… Part of what the church is doing is creating presbytery mission plans… and each congregation has been asked to complete an audit on the life of that congregation… We’ve had a group doing that for the last couple of months… and we’ve had plenty to say… plenty to describe and speak of with a very positive story to tell…

I looked at the completed version this week… and gave a sigh of satisfaction… a lot going on… thanks to so many creative and encouraging and loyal folk in this faith community…

But I had to stop and remind myself… this isn’t an end of term report… to prove ourselves…

Everything we do… everything… is about pointing… being a sign post to the one John describes when he says… the one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals…

As a congregation… we have been extremely fortunate in our history from the generosity and faith of those who have been before us. We may have been the largest congregation in Scotland at one time. We may have been the wealthiest - but these are not marks of who we are. These are marks of our faith, our hope, our vision, that points and signposts the one whose sandals we are not worthy to untie…

So as we go through the process of exploring what the presbytery mission plan will shape here… which will take much of this year… we won’t just wait and see what happens… but will create many more signposts for people towards God’s love. To be the contemporary John the baptists… who point towards something greater.

We have task groups beginning to be formed to which everyone in the congregation will be invited to be part of. The thinking was introduced last year: Welcome, Creativity, Relationships, Family, Wellbeing, Communication… many exciting small projects and time-limited tasks to open us up to each other and work alongside our whole community. To be a parish church that puts energy into our community again after the pandemic, to be the spark, along with others, that injects new life and love into our parish, enthusiasm for being here alongside others. All of which this congregation has often shown and shared.

We are a resourcing church. We will point and we will signpost, beyond ourselves, beyond this building, beyond our traditions and history, as changes to all the churches in Bearsden become apparent… we will continue to signpost the one we follow, trust and love… together… that is our gift.

Martin Luther King words earlier come back to us here: “Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites. The aftermath of the ‘fight with fire’ method… is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that.”

May we ever point to… and be signposts to that love in everything we do… shape… create… imagine… and love into being…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Creating God

We gather our world

And our experience of that world

The concerns we have

And the thoughts of others

And seek your good news

your marks of love

Through all we know

May we follow the signs of justice

For our environment and communities

That we might live more fairly

With creation and each other

Scattering words of truth

And speaking truth to power

That we bring new life to this world

Hear us

May we follow the signs of welcome

To those who have no home

Running from that which threatens them

Because of religion, politics, culture, gender, language

The prejudices that cause cracks across the world

And the mania that goes with it

May welcome be the antidote

To the oppression of fear

May we follow the signs of grace

For those without vaccine

Without food

Without stability

And seek the means and the ways

To rebalance

To build back better

To renew our covenant with you

Towards our neighbour

Our parish

Our community

And may we follow the signs of love

For our family and friends

For those hurting and lonely

Those grieving and those ill physically and mentally

And find how we might accompany each

To richer living

Supported live

Companions on the way

Loving God

May we have a faith that sees

Those signs

Of your kingdom

Right here among us

And follow them

Towards each other

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**