**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Sunday 6th August 2023**

**Luke 8:26-39**

**Gathering**

On the shores of the loch

The fishers heard a promise

In the words of a carpenter

Calling them into a new world order

By that same loch

The Galilean is found again

Among the Gerasene tombstones

Of the bound up and frightened

Such graveyards are for us

The most life-giving of places

Where stones roll away

And what is bound up is set free.

In such a place

Among the tombstones

The bound up demoniacs

In the promise

That dares believe beyond the rules of this world

As a community

We gather

And worship

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and today we are still by the shores of Galilee… but we’ve move round the coast a bit and sailing into gentile territory… Here the kingdom still seems to be as abundant and challenging and generous… this time to a bound up man… full of demons… and darkness… but soon to be set free… Let us worship

**Prayer**

In this place, O God

In this moment, O God

Among these people, O God

We bring ourselves

Not our Sunday selves

Or the best version of ourselves

But the whole of ourselves

Fragile and hurting selves

Unwieldy and hesitating selves

Enthusiastic and imaginative selves

Creative and questioning selves

Our many sides

And our many intentions

And here

In this moment, O God

In this place, O God

Among these people, O God

Lay it all down

In all its honest awkwardness

That you might unfold it

Compassionately

Tenderly

Forgivingly

Giving it space to breathe

To be confessed

And then refold it in the shape of love

And indulged with grace

From this place of renewal

May we live the freedom such compassion brings

Grasping the fullness of life once more

That we might in turn forgive each other

And find a new future possible between us

And together

Travel out from among the tombstones we are so used to

Into a world that seeks the gift we have

And the gift we are

For the world

Called resurrection

Called renewal

Called good news

In this place, O God

In this moment, O God

Among these people, O God

We pray

With words

With silences

With hesitations

And with our living

We share words and longings

That unite us all in the global prayer

**Scripture Introduction**

On the shore of the loch called Galilee… a few miles round from the place of calling of the fishers last week… but in gentile territory… is a village… but can hardly be seen… as there is a storm… a great hoolie of wind and wave…

It was really no distance between the one village and the other… except it was as huge as could be… moving from Jewish into Gentile territory… No wonder there was a storm… even the waves and wind knew the meeting of these two worlds was not in the order of things…

Yet here they were… disciples and a rabbi… pulling themselves out from the last of the storm… suddenly quelled by the one whom even the wind and waves obey…

But there was still something in the air… some sense that peace was not quite settled in place… for there was a noise… nae, a screaming… a shouting… from beyond this world… among the tombstones… many voices… clamouring all at once… to the one called the prince of peace… It was no longer serene… another storm was brewing… a bigger one… not of wind and wave… but of word and worlds… Might the prince of peace reign here too?…

**Scripture: Luke 8:16-39**

They arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. **27**As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. **28**When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me’— **29**for Jesus[c] had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) **30**Jesus then asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him. **31**They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

**32**Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons[d] begged Jesus[e] to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. **33**Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

**34**When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. **35**Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. **36**Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. **37**Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes[f] asked Jesus[g] to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. **38**The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus[h] sent him away, saying, **39**‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

**Reflection**

We are free… We are God’s people and we have a story about freedom… not just from the every day shackles… but from the ultimate one of death… We are free… and we have a story that speaks impossibly often about being set free from demons… illness… oppression… exclusion… sin… religion…

The list is an endless one… of examples of Jesus and his freedom kingdom… where tax collectors and demoniacs… women and fisherfolk… children and the diseased find themselves around tables… celebrating the chance of new life… possibility and future…

That is our story… Why does it not always feel that way when we live it in our churches and communities… Perhaps it does… Perhaps the church is the freest place we know… where we can be fully alive to each other in God… abounding is generous welcome for those others turn their back on… and if that is the experience of church for you… then teach us… because it is not the feeling in many places… where we are bound up in fear of the other… hesitating over those who think different from us… unsure what to do with presbytery plans closures… or how to respond to equal marriage… or mental health… or our traditions over communion… baptism…

Our list of caveats and uncertainties and worries being a godly institution is a long one too…

So when we read of a demoniac… chained among the tombs by the fearful villagers… to keep him and them safe… that twilight zone of being alive among the dead… we have a problem…

The problem of who we are in this story… We all gravitate towards at least one of the characters in Jesus’ stories… we’re the good Samaritans… not the beaten up man… the lost son… not the elder sibling… But in this story… who are we?…

I’ve always been one of the villagers… I am a complete bystander… completely unengaged…

But what if we read this story as Legion… What if… as a church… we aren’t the ones in control… who can do nothing to make things better for us… in this almost twilight existence as church in our culture now…

What if we are the ones who need a freeing word… a liberating gospel… an exorcism from the legion of worries and anxieties and grief that has bound us up for decades as a church… Maybe that is just me… but as a church we live between worlds today… trapped… by fear… of what to say… how to respond to the arguments of the world over so many injustices… imbalances… and fear…

We have bound ourselves up in a standard routine of being church… unable to free ourselves from who we have become… able to find new life… with declining numbers and presbytery plans…

Legion is bound up… maintained in that twilight zone… keeping the status quo… not knowing what we can do to bring freedom…

But the the villagers meet a man who cuts through all that… A man outside their culture… a Jew in a Gentile land… He speaks from outwith the mans, and their tradition… and culture…

A lesson for the church… To be free from the legion of contemporary demons of grief and loss and worry… the Jesus we proclaim… can be found among those beyond our walls… with a voice beyond our traditions…

From where is Jesus speaking new life into us now?… freedom into this beloved church… into her future… May we have ears to hear… that our chains are broken… and our life is set free to be alive beyond the tombstones again…

**News**

**Prayer**

God beyond the tombs

The dark places

The fear

The violence

May we find our way into the light

Of freedom

And renewal

And be that prayer in the world

Bound up in the legions of war

In Somalia, Niger and Senegal

Afghanistan and Syria

Ukraine and Russia

That limits humanity

And reduces what is good in us

We pray for leadership that is bigger than self

And a humanity bigger than the limits of our fearful living

Bound up in the politics of populism

Of the clash between environment and winning votes

That endless cycle that limits our vision

To the next five years

And no one dares the bigger picture

We pray for a freedom that unbinds us from fear-filled legacy

And an openness to the daring future of working together

Bound up in only what we know, be it a devil or otherwise,

For our health service, our education, our society

Where everything is justified by numbers and people’s stories are footnotes

We pray for a society that judges itself

Not on its wealth and power

But on how it treats the least and the poorest,

Bound up with each other

Our neighbours and families

Our communities and parishes

We pray for the relationships between us

Towards the physically and mentally ill

Those who face violence and abuse

Those who cannot make ends meet because of crisis

Here in Bearsden and Wilmington

Drumchapel and Maryhill

We pray O God

For the freedom that celebrates life

Lived to the full

Together

Where the gaps between us reduce

And we choose to live in justice

And towards each other

Hear our prayer

So be it

Amen

**Blessing**