

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Luke 7:18-35

12th February 2017

Spirit... come by this way... take flight among us... disturb and challenge... and comfort and change us... always change us... always that we may grow into who we are yet to be... always reformed... always being saved... always alive to the kingdom...

It is a good day for us... 368th anniversary of being a parish... not a church... not a club... not even a congregation... but a parish...

That means it's the 368th anniversary of these people of faith... engaging with our neighbourhood... and living out the good news within this area...

It's an anniversary of relationship... of being in relationship with our neighbours... It's not a time to pat ourselves on our backs... for surviving another year... or even a time of thinking of ourselves... its an anniversary of thinking about others... and most especially our neighbours...

Which is what I love about this anniversary... because it takes all the light and reflects it away from ourselves... and reminds us why we exist... by shining on our parish...

And that parish... however... is not always something we continually find ourselves thinking about... We have to confess... sometimes we get so caught up in our building... or an organisation... our anniversary serves as a corrective to remind us... to live beyond these walls... and be the Body of Christ... from just south of Killearn to Dobbies in the East... did you know our parish has coffee shops the length and breadth of it...

But there is another thing to say about the anniversary of our parish... It is the anniversary of an adventure... of choosing not to remain in the one place all these years... Yes, perhaps physically... but not in our relationships with our neighbour... We have come through world wars... disruption... Napoleonic wars... the reign of a number of monarchs... through political upheaval... emancipation for women and for slaves... even the union of the United Kingdom... and a few tries to return to independence...

And we have been a Parish Church... offering a relationship with our neighbour in this area... through these times... regardless of what else has been going on...

I was talking to one of my neighbours about this... and she wondered if we might have a cake with 368 candles on it... I suggested that would certainly keep us warmer... but we'd need a fire extinguisher to blow them out...

It's a sign of stability... of security... and there is that in an anniversary... of being something for that great length of time... not for ourselves... but for other people...

But without dampening the party... let us go back further than 368 years... to the gospels... as we do every Sunday when we gather here in this parish... where John the baptiser... needs to ask Jesus... 'Are you the one... or should we be looking for someone else'...

Now of all the people in the Bible to ask that question... surely the last person... ought to be John the Baptist...

This is the one who strides out of the wilderness shouting passages from Isaiah... wearing a coat of camel hair... He's the one who stands up to his midriff in the Jordan... pointing and shouting at the Pharisees... He's the one who calls the religion scholars broods of vipers and white washed sepulchres... This is not someone you imagine having a crisis of identity over the Messiah...

But he does...

He has to draw breath... because he's sitting there in Herod's prison... and has too much time to think... and wonders... 'Are you the one, Jesus?'...

It is one of those great moments in the gospel story... when you realise... even the great ones... even the legends... who wear their faith tattooed across themselves... where everyone can see... pause and ask... 'Did I get this right'...

And on this anniversary of being a parish... we're still asking 'have we got that right?'... Let no one presume we have it all worked out... that we all 'get' Jesus... that we have the answer to everything... or we all agree in what we believe...

Because we live by faith... In other words... we trust into what is yet in store for us... we live by questions and adventures and wonder...

And maybe we are still a parish church... because of that... because we haven't been so rigid in what we think... or so certain that we always get it right... or that we imagine we know what God thinks... that we allow ourselves to make mistakes and seek forgiveness... We have a real and living relationship with this parish... and with God... which Jesus says is one and the same relationship... love God and love your neighbour... that's all we really need to focus on... everything else is commentary...

So because we have done just what John the Baptist did... and questioned and doubted... because we have wondered 'have we got this right?'... and dared evolve in our believe... because we haven't drawn a line in the sand and said only if you believe that or this... can you come in... because we live by faith into the future and not faith in our answers... because our love for our neighbour is unconditional... challenging yes... and difficult at times... but unconditional... then we have been a parish for 368 years... that is alive to our neighbours... and intending to stick around for them... and expect some further adventures together in faith...

And in celebrating the long years of service today... we give thanks that there are still people who dare keep believing... and live out that belief... in particular duties and responsibilities among us...

But through them... and I dare the eight who received certificates this morning... might agree... we celebrate **all**... who have joined this journey for the long term... and who have a long view of faith... who have steadily been here... and even more loyally... living in a parish... and being the love of God to our neighbour...

But still we hesitate... wonder... have we got this right... that daring question of John's... Are you the one...

You know... Jesus never answers that question... which is one of Jesus most annoying habits... All he says is... Look... look around you at what is happening... look at the relationships restored... the transformations happening in people's lives... Don't look towards an individual... the kingdom of God isn't about an individual... look at what is happening among your neighbours...

There is our ultimate corrective... and guide post... If you wish to find out if Jesus is the one... or if New Kilpatrick Parish Church... believes he is the one... don't look at them... or the building... or the number of years we're been here... look to the neighbours being loved... to the transformation in the parish... the relationships being restored... There is your answer...

And there is our calling for our 369th year...