

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

25th February 2018

John 13:1-17

Spirit... may we find the word... the image... the hope... that changes who we are... always growing closer to the imagination... the inspiration... the possibility... you have sown in us... and our community...

As will be perfectly obvious... from my completely unrefined... and rather below par physique... I'm not the world's greatest sports person...

However... I have been quite engaged... from the comfort of my sofa... with the winter olympics... and I would truly love... to be able to try... big air snow boarding... or snowboard cross... which got me moving... to the edge of the settee...

It just looks fabulous... I mean I know I wouldn't be able to stand up on a snowboard lying on a piece of carpet... let alone cascade down a hill... and to imagine ever being able to do a cab double cork 10 80... or a frontside grab/indy... is just surreal... mainly because I have absolutely no idea what they are... but there is something about the excitement and adrenalin that totally appeals...

But I wonder if some of that appeal... is because I'm removed... almost completely... from the everyday... that seems to be increasingly shaped by pressure and anxiety... And the following is a somewhat personal take on today's story... following an article in the paper this week... saying half a million people in the UK suffer from work-related stress and psychological breakdown...

But we should see this not as a symptom of an individual... but a symptom of a failing society which itself seems to be facing burn-out... where austerity, rising poverty and uncertainty caused by Brexit etc... push people to and beyond their limits...

And the point is that it starts early... because we tend to train our young folk simply to achieve... rather than live... so much so... it seems we have developed an education system... that pushes teachers to teach pupils simply how to pass exams... rather than enjoy a subject... teaching this is how you answer this type of question... rather than... go and experience Shakespeare... The pressure is huge...

Thus the mental health... of our young people... and every generation... is very fragile at the moment... with support frighteningly underfunded... The priorities we have chosen to shape how we care for people's welfare... have allowed us to reach the point of extremely limited support... and the antithesis of what we actually need... and instead of a community that has an increased sense of belonging... and purpose and worth... we have greater loneliness... and isolation of carers and cared for... People are less valued... have less purpose... Our society is suffering burn-out... and this week someone suggested burn-out is the condition of our times...

So without being flippant... does anyone fancy snow boarding instead?...

But you know what... you don't need snowboarding to take you out of that rather depressing way we're shaping society at the moment... You need a towel and a basin... because what we need surely is to serve the needs of others... the original biblical... blueprint... of community, parish and society...

Jesus washing the feet of the disciples... is a story of humility... the saviour bending down to wash away the stour and dirt of the journey... rather than as the master... expecting his disciples to do that to him...

This is Jesus... who thinks nothing of changing places with the tired and worn out... and saying... in your tiredness... and worry... you belong to be... I love you... I value you... so let me do this for you... let *me* serve *you*...

Over the last few years... we've been asking... 'What does it mean to be church today?'... Well here's the answer:... you tired... you anxious... you lonely... you burned out... let me serve you...

And in a world where we are rather judged by what we add to the value of something else... how much we can put onto the value of the CEO's bonus... add to the value of the economy... add value to the GDP... then foot washing becomes the antidote to that...

Because the priority... is not the value we can add to the worth of an institution... but recognise each one of us is valuable on our own... enough for the Lord of time... to kneel and wash our feet...

And the foot washing says to me at least... when you chose to make that your priority to treat people like that... when you wash the feet of the tired... the burned out... the lonely... you change the whole dynamic of how we relate to each other... and grasp what it means to have belonging... worth and purpose...

In the same paper as that article about burnout... was another article which to me... was the tonic for the original one... It was a story of the town of Frome... in Somerset... where provisional data is showing that when isolated people who have health problems... are supported by community groups and volunteers... the number of emergency admissions to hospital falls dramatically...

GP Helen Kingston... kept encountering patients who felt simply that they're a cluster of symptoms... and her staff were stressed by looking after one symptom after another rather than the whole person... so she and others... set up a directory of agencies and community groups... from mental health support groups to flower clubs... churches to dementia groups... filling the gaps with new groups for people with particular conditions...

The purpose was simply to connect people to the groups that would support them best... but it was a whole town initiative... everyone took part... and now... in Frome... emergency admissions to hospital have fallen 17% over three years... Across the rest of the county they rose by 29%...

It's not rocket science... It's community... It is not a brand new initiative... it is the oldest trick in the book... loving neighbour... and if we are anything... anything at all as a church who loves God and loves neighbour... then surely this partly secular story... in the context of a society that is burned out... illustrates the gospel truth... loving neighbour works... and reestablishes value and worth and purpose and belonging... the prescription for burn out...

And perhaps we live most authentically in loving our neighbour... when we connect the the 40-odd groups that make up New Kilpatrick... with groups and opportunities across our

parish... restoring a sense of value and belonging... by connecting people with each other again...

Here is our purpose... Here is what it means to be church... a community that decides the gospel is not so much about what we believe... but how we serve... and love... our neighbour... together...

This surely is our blueprint... The story of foot washing... takes those who are tired... burned out by a society... in a society that is burned out... and believes... we can shape a more authentic community with others to say... you do belong... you are valuable... you are loved...

Is this a vision of what we are becoming as a contemporary church... and it gives me a bigger thrill than any snowboard jump... to serve our parish... with others... and refocus our community towards giving back worth and purpose and belonging the anxious... the burned out... the lonely... through supporting... loving... connecting everyone in community again... artists... singers... mental health workers... doctors... churches... cafes... clubs... a community that starts here... that knows it begins in serving our neighbour...

Is this is what it means to be church today?... Come and see...

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