**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**14th May 2023**

**Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-22**

**Gathering**

All’s well that ends well

In the completion of the story of Esther

All’s well that ends well

As the oppressors lose their power

All’s well that ends well

As Esther rises in her bravery and cunning

All’s NOT so well

For the oppressor now oppressed

And everything is compromised

In the win for heaven

It is a messy and compromised world

And today we journey through it

**Introduction**

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and as always… it is good to be together… and thank you for the invitation to be with you today…

We finally come to the conclusion of the story of Esther… It has been a while since we began and so… in all the best TV drama traditions… here’s Previously on Esther…

King Ahasuerus, removes Vashti as queen for not displaying herself in front of his guests… Her defiance of her husband puts fear into all the men of the empire… so she is deposed, and the king orders a new bride… There is a beauty contest and Esther (a Jew, but don’t tell anyone) wins the king’s favour…

Shortly afterwards, Esther’s uncle, Mordecai discovers a plot to assassinate Ahasuerus. The conspirators are hanged, and Mordecai gets promoted…

Xerxes appoints a man called Haman as viceroy... Haman doesn’t like Mordecai, because Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman… Haman plots to kill Mordecai, and all the Jews in the empire… A royal decree is issued throughout the kingdom to slay all Jews on a date chosen by dice…

Mordecai implores Esther to intercede with the King… She invites Xerxes to a feast in the company of Haman… During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening… Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordecai and, at his wife's suggestion, has a gallows built to hang Mordecai…

That night, Ahasuerus cannot sleep, and orders the court records be read to him… He is reminded that Mordecai interceded in the previous plot against his life, and discovers that Mordecai never received any recognition… In a moment of unfortunate timing… Haman appears… requesting permission to hang Mordecai, but… before he can make this request… the king asks Haman, “What should be done for a man the King wishes to honour?”… Haman is a bit full of himself and thinks the king is talking about him… and so Haman suggests that the man be dressed in the King's royal robes and crown and led around on the King's royal horse, while a [herald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herald) calls: "See how the King honours a man he wishes to reward!". To his surprise and horror, the King instructs Haman to do so to Mordecai… It’s not going well…

**Prayer**

Loving God

In this community together

We create a welcome for each other

Beyond those we can see

Yet know we are connected

Through love

Through grace

Through a shared story

In our listening together

May we hear the story told for us

And in our wondering together

May we ask the questions we need to ask

May our worship

Be open to our humanity as we are

And not as we would like ourselves to be

So, we come with the disappointments

And the insecurities

And the sense of letting you down

Yet we believe

In this time together

We are redeemed

Renewed by a word of life

Of promise

That speaks into our hopes

And our futures

For there is where you continually meet us

In tomorrow

In what is yet to be

In what this day shapes and tomorrow brings

Hear us as we pause in this time together

Finding the space

To be ourselves

In your presence

And know that is enough

Hear us as we share the Lord’s Prayer

**Scripture**

**1**So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. **2**On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, ‘What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.’ **3**Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. **4**For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.’[a] **5**Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?’ **6**Esther said, ‘A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!’ Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. **7**The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. **8**When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said, ‘Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?’ As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. **9**Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, ‘Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.’ And the king said, ‘Hang him on that.’ **10**So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

**Esther 9:20-22**

**20**Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, **21**enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, **22**as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

**Reflection**

And so, we finally end the tale of Esther… except we don’t quite because we’ve missed out, probably, the worst bit of all… You see the king has decreed that the Jews should be slaughtered… the decree that Haman persuaded the king to announce… So Esther works her magic again on the king so he does some further decree making… this time to allow the Jews their day of revengeful destruction… and in the end 75,000 Persians are killed at the hands of the Jews…

Big problem here when the oppressed become the oppressor… as happens so regularly in our history… Some will argue it is self defence… others the right to slaughter their enemies… The story was going so well up to this point and now good and evil aren’t as simple as we thought they were…

But Esther isn’t a history book… The writer isn’t actually concerned with history at all… This is a story designed to be read by folk who are in exile… It is a lot of hyperbole, a colourful story to keep up the spirits of those who are far from home… though that hardly excuses the xenophobia at the end…

The question behind Esther is: How do you find courage in exile?… What words do you give those who are scattered across someone else’s empire… and you have no homeland… because that is what this story is designed to offer…

If the story was written in the 4 century BCE… as we think it was… Jews were living throughout the Greek empire… soon to become a Roman one… There was no real Jewish homeland… so they found themselves living among foreigners… and there was a need for focus… Exiles needed hope and Esther offers that…

Of course… God is left out of the story… God is never mentioned… at least in the original Hebrew version… There was a later Greek version that wrote God into the story… prayers were added… characters more sanitised… which actually removes them from a compromised and messy world… and leaves God in charge… which is fine… but it isn’t real… and given the terrible ending to this book… God is maybe best left out of it… Don’t put on God what is your own doing… That’s the reality… and we are all in that boat…

So, Esther… perhaps… is a book of our time… for whatever exile we are in… and certainly as an institution called the church… that’s exactly where we are… and in our political structures at the moment… that lack of certainty with no great vision or sense of who we are any longer… as a nation, it feels we are in exile…

And we need stories such as this… ultimately… to keep alight a dim and spluttering flame of hope… faith that the great arc of truth curves towards justice… Esther has served Judaism for centuries with a tale to provide hope in the midst of despair… and in exile… as the Jews found… we have a choice… we can let God go and be taken over by the empire of the time… and ultimately die… or we can let God grow… into something renewed… reimagined… that will ultimately live…

Esther is an invitation to let God grow… Not to let empire take over… but make space for a reimagining… a renewal… a resurrection… This fable of legendary people… is our invitation today… to ask ourselves… how might we keep the hope alive as we reimagine God, and faith and our future…

**Prayer**

Loving God

May you be in this world

May you be the light

The hope

The possibility

May you still be God

In the conflict of Sudan and Ukraine

In the way poverty has dramatically increased

Because of war and pandemics

And fear for our wealth

May you still be God

In the places of hunger

Because of climate change

And trade rules

And cost of living crisis

May you still be God

By the bedsides of the ill

And those who have to wait

And the lack of investment

In our health and social services

May you still be God

In our neighbourhoods

Our communities

Our families

Especially our young folk

And exam season and uncertain futures

May you still be God

In this messy and compromising world

Who is in with the stoor

And the chaos

And the real lives of your people

Loving God

May you still be God

In a confused and exiled world

And tell stories of love

To bring us together again

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**