**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**28th September 2022**

**Luke 16:19-31**

**Gathering**

There is a wideness in God’s mercy

A breadth of compassion

And our invitation is to find ourselves within that

Living and breathing within that wideness

It is God’s gift

God’s grace

May we meet each other here

And find this place

Is generous

Welcoming

And an invitation into life

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and again, thank you for the invitation to be with you today. Over the last weeks, in many ways we have felt ourselves bound together, closer to one another through our national mourning. It is a unique time when we find ourselves close like that.

More often we find ourselves living different lives, a great gap between us which perhaps this week, straight after being bound together in mourning, we are back to the reality of an increasing gap between the haves and have-nots with bonuses back on the agenda and new taxation.

Jesus has a story about that. In fact, Jesus has many stories about that. We find ourselves somewhere between the rich man and Lazarus, somewhere in some afterlife, discovering how big the gap is…

**Prayer**

Loving God

In this place of grace

We meet you

And trust you

And hold you

Because there is little else we can do

Or want to do

May we find healing here

And a renewing of our spirit

That sends us into the world

With hope and possibility

May we hear a word from heaven

That speaks into this moment between us

That renews that which is failing

And encourages that which is fading

May we hear a silence as deep as love itself

And deeper still than the hurts we hold

And in which we can lay these down

And let them go

And may we turn towards each other now

In grace and generosity

And invite the love you have redeemed us with

Into every relationship we have

That we might fold away the gap

That prejudice brings

And wealth grows

And fear magnifies

And find ourselves

Next to

Beside

And within touching distance of each other

And in touch with you

Hear us as we pray together

**Scripture Introduction**

Here is a well-known story of Jesus: Lazarus and the Rich Man, sometimes known as DIves… but the actual point is that the rich man has no name, which is highly unusual. It is the poor man who is given a name… a complete reversal of roles. Clearly something is going on here.

It seems to be an ancient Egyptian tale that was well known in Jesus’ time about the reversal of fortunes when you died rather than a story Jesus himself made up. But that is often what Jesus did, took old stories and reinvented them, Passover into the Lord’s Supper being the biggest of them.

The other thing to say is that the whole setting of the story is hyperbole. Heaven is not up there, and Hades or hell is not necessarily hot. I wouldn’t necessarily take the setting as Jesus describing what the afterlife is like. That’s not the point of the story.

**Reading**

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. **20**And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, **21**who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. **22**The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A19-31&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25635a)] The rich man also died and was buried. **23**In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A19-31&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25636b)] **24**He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” **25**But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. **26**Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” **27**He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— **28**for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” **29**Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” **30**He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” **31**He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”’

**Reflection**

Last week we came together as a nation in all the symbolism and tradition of mourning, and this week we are beginning to return to news of the reality of that nation: about how big a gap there is between those with least and those with most. And there are arguments, and there will be more, about the cost-of-living response, energy caps, and the return of bonuses, that will help bring in more tax, and a whole lot of things I don’t pretend to understand.

Clearly, I’m not an economist. My bank account, of which I don’t know how to get into, is out of reach, and I have no idea the nuances and consequences of so-called trickle-down economics that don’t actually work.

However, here we have a story that speaks directly into this, not economically but morally. The bible constantly does this: offers a story that goes right to the heart of things.

I always approach these stories with the hope that we can hear it again as if for the first time, by exploring it from a different angle, or expose some background information of the culture of the time that brings a new and different understanding… but no matter how much I’ve looked at the story, and used all the books and websites I usually do to seek another angle on it, there doesn’t seem to be one. What you read, is as it is. And the face value of the story is the one everyone heard 2000 years ago as much as today.

And that’s fine. Sometimes it is good to know the story is as it is. We can spend a whole lot of time debating it all, going round in circles, trying to justify our wealth and what it means and feel challenged and awkward about it all.

But with this parable, that is a bit of a waste of time. I’m afraid it is quite clear. What you read is what you get.

But, and this is the bit to remember, this is a parable. It is not a prediction. It is a parable, and if we read it like that, then can we reimagine the ending? Might that be our task, to live in such a way that the ending can be rewritten?

My friends, we aren’t locked into this. This ending isn’t a certainty. The story itself serves as a warning, the same warning the rich man wanted to send his brothers, the Moses and the prophets that were already there to change the lifestyle of his family.

Indeed, as Jesus suggests that if they didn’t pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they wouldn’t pay attention to a man back from the dead.

But we have the one who ***did*** come back from death. Heed him.

Christian Aid used to have the slogan: we believe in life before death. Perhaps we can retell this parable, adapt the ending, and change the life after death, by the life we life before death.

And thus, reducing the gap between each of us here, we might recognise the wideness the grace God offers us all.

**News**

**Prayer**

Loving God

May we find you between the gaps

The bridge that brings us together

In love

In justice

In grace

And as we pray for a world of gaps

May we pray also for as closer community

A more balanced world

And world that sees peace

As a way of life where everyone has enough

Enough food

Enough shelter

Enough promise for the future

Enough safety without prejudice

Enough peace to live well

Enough time to know a next generation

And so, we pray for Pakistan in floods

And Somalia in drought

We pray for Ukraine at war

And Yemen pausing

We pray for the gaps between us in our own communities

And the anxiety of the future

And we pray for each other

For families and friends

For those ill both physically and mentally

We pray for those worried about jobs

And warmth

About tomorrow

And the day after

Hear us in our prayers

And in our pauses

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**