**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**24th May 2023**

**Luke 18:1-8**

**Gathering**

Come all

Come lost and found

Come forgotten and famous

Come broken and renewed

There is a gathering place

Where everyone is uniquely known

An individual

Named and loved

In such a space

And in such a time

We gather

As we are

We gather

To worship

**Welcome**

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton… the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for the invitation to join you today… We genuinely make a space… that is open to us… We aren’t always good at doing that… we carry with us our prejudices and fears… We make it difficult for ourselves at times… In spite of that… let us grow into such a space… such a community that challenges… supports… and loves us all… This is worship…

**Prayer**

Loving God

In this community

We gather

And in being here

In sharing our stories

We learn to be your people

May this be such a time

To encounter truth

And hold promise

And be moved by faith

That we might rediscover that ancient story in us

Of you breathing into dust

And shaping human form

And bringing life

Sharing who we are

The cracks in our facade

The joys in our laughter

The bruises in our stories

Coming together here

To be renewed

With that great love

That forgives and reshapes us

In such a promise

We gather

And meet you

Bringing all we are

Into the eternal and ancient community

And know we

As we are

Individually and uniquely

Are loved

And redeemed

And called into life again

In this moment

We know we are reborn

And we give thanks

Lord’s Prayer

**The Setting**

Parables are not typical stories… They can be read on many levels… and they are designed to move us to rethink what we originally thought… They are clever and we don’t always understand them… You can’t always take them at face value… or at least the face value we take from them… is often quite different from the face value the original hearers took from them… a distance of 2000 years loses some of the original impact… so we have to learn a bit about the culture and background and presumptions of those who first heard them.

The parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow is case in point when even Luke… the gospel writer… doesn’t quite understand what it is about… He interprets it for us saying it is about prayer… and then slips in at the end the return of Jesus… It’s a bit confusing… The actual core parable is in the middle of this passage, and it is topped and tailed by Luke… So let’s read the whole thing… but sit more lightly with Luke’s own interpretation of it… and leave space for our own…

**Reading**

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.”’And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’

**Reflection**

There have constantly been people I have met throughout my life who have totally surprised me… I’ve typecast them… because of their job… or the congregation they attend… or the version of the Bible they read… and it is appalling… thinking I have a measure of them (often negative) because of not so unconscious bias…

And I am sorry I have done that…This week I’ll be sitting in the general assembly of the church… the great annual jamboree… though jamboree is a bit too positive a word… (and there I go again) … and I know I’ll presume things about people because of who they keep company with…

My only excuse… and it isn’t a very good one is that I am scared of the General Assembly… I feel completely out my depth… and the thought of actually speaking fills me with dread… because I know… everyone will be judging me… and they do that… because they are scared too… It’s really not a healthy place…

Of course… all of us do it all the time… the Bible being one place where it readily happens… vividly in the story called the unjust judge… which helps us work out what side we are on…

Clearly, we are on the side of the widow… because she a widow… she’s exposed… she’s vulnerable… she’s old… but she’s got tenacity… and she speaks truth to power…

Except, does she…?

Luke the gospel writer spins this parable as one about being persistent in prayer… which to me is just bad theology… that God won’t listen to us until we are banging on the doors of heaven… disturbing God’s R&R…I accept it is all hyperbole… but the principle is the same…

But that surely isn’t what the parable is about… That is only Luke’s take on it, who is having trouble himself working out what it is about… I don’t know what it means either…

All I know is that a parable sets up a challenge… It is meant to spin us around from what is expected… and this one certainly does…

A few questions to think about… is the widow old? … I bet most of us imagine her to be so… but there is nothing in the text suggesting that… But a more significant question… Is she in the right?…

Most translations say she is seeking justice… only that’s not actually the word… The widow is asking to be avenged… The widows desire for vengeance is the same word as the vengeance executed on Egypt’s first-born sons in the 10th plague… and of Samson against the Philistines…

Remember these are Jews listening to this story… they make different cultural connections from us… with their history… and they go back to the killing of the first born and Samson killing the Philistines…

So how is this widow sounding to you now…

Luke has tamed her further by saying she gets justice because she will wear out the judge… But again… that’s far too gentle… what the judge says is he will give the widow what she wants because the widow will give him a black eye… That is what it actually says… Either literally or just threatening violence… this widow is more gangsta granny…

Then there is the judge… fearing no one including God… handing out judgements on the basis of expedience rather than justice… not on merit but on threat… allowing the widow to take her vengeance… Justice doesn’t come into the story at any point with either character… It ends with the threat of violence and corruption…

So where to now? … Well perhaps the least we can say is that it warns us against stereotyping folk… because no one here is as we presume, or as culture dictates… and that is a good lesson at the moment in terms of immigration and welfare…

When we smash our stereotypes… we learn to see people as they are… rather than social caricatures… and that speaks into unconscious bias and how we respond to folk… Already this parable is having a good go at us…

But then both characters are complicit in taking vengeance… the widow wants it, and the judge allows it… there is nothing here about reconciliation… Maybe we aren’t meant to identify with either character… because both force us to recognise systemic corruption…

The parable forces us to see how things really work… a valuable lesson in the way trade rules are set, and tax havens work, and those who have done least pay the most for the effects of climate change… all of which the work of Christian Aid uncovers too… When you recognise systemic wrongs… that the characters, both of which we, on the face of it, ought to trust… have their own selfish agendas and corruption… you can work to change it…

Jesus was focused on compassion… fairness… reconciliation… There is none of that in this parable… Because the characters are not as we expect… Jesus forces us to find a different moral compass… and in order to do that… we have to question our stereotypes… and challenge our assumptions… and be ready for what we find…

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Loving God

When it is difficult to know what to say

And even more difficult to know where to start

May we pause

And know our silences speak for us

Pause

And in those silences

We hold our world

And the feelings we have

When injustice seems to win

Decisions are made for the few

And conflict is for personal gain

Pause

A world that is upside down compared to the kingdom

Out of balance

With conflict and corruption and suffering

And so we pray

For peace

For presence

For possibility

Pause

For Ukraine and Sudan

For where conflict happens

And where hunger is everywhere

For refugees within and out with their own countries

In the channel, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar

Pause

We long for the world to be so different

To dare to tip the scales towards justice

So may we persist

May we hold faith

May we change our stereotypes

And live in a different relationship with each other

Pause

And for families and friends

For those ill and those seeking peace

Those tired of life and those who find little joy

For our communities and neighbourhoods

And church in general assembly

We pray

Pause

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**