**New Kilpatrick**

**YouTube**

**18th September 2022**

**Luke 16:1-13**

**Gathering**

There is a place

Prepared for everyone

Kings and queens

The least and the lost

There is a place

Prepared for everyone

A seat at the table

That has no head

There is a place

Prepared for everyone

A banquet set for all

Where everyone has enough

Let us gather as God people, all

And know the love we share

And the community that holds us

There is a place

Prepared for everyone

And in grace we meet in it

And in love we welcome each other

**Introduction**

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish, and as a parish and nation, we are still in a time of mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. It is a time to reflect on what we feel ourselves because of Her Majesty, but a time too to draw ourselves into community, and recognise we cope with these moments best, together.

Together we live the story we are, together we share the fears, together we care for each other, together we ask the questions we need, and together we listen to each other.

And so, we do that today, but it doesn’t always make sense. That is perhaps us at our most human and faithful, living with things that don’t make sense. Jesus offers us a parable today that does exactly that and, in exploring it, perhaps we find a wee bit more about how we live together in our uncertainties and questions.

**Prayer**

Loving God

As a nation continues to mourn

And we prepare ourselves for Her Majesty’s funeral

We pause here

With the tiredness of our emotions

And a question about the future

And lay them here

In your presence

In your grace

In your possibility

In your patience

And know, in our uncertainties

We are willing to meet you

As we truly are

At our most vulnerable

That closest moment and place

Here may we trust the love

That holds everything

And reshapes all things

And heals that which hurts

And renews that which is moribund

That, together, we create the community of love

And invite all people

To a place that is uniquely shaped for them and us

And each finds our space here

Where we are forgiven

Renewed

Invited to begin again

And called afresh into the world

To be your people

In this new way

Great God

Loving God

Holy God

Of monarchs and people

May we find you as we are

And know your blessing

Of life and hope

Service and community

Laughter and love

Hear us in the global prayer

**Scripture Introduction**

I can honestly say, I have very little idea what this parable is about or how best to understand it. I won’t quite say you are on your own with this one but whatever you think about it will be as good an attempt at understanding it as anyone. I’m not sure even Luke, who wrote it, is entirely sure what he was talking about.

The joy of this kind of passage is that it levels you. No one can say for absolute certain what it means and depending on your experience or cultural background, you’ll understand it differently. There is the beauty of the scripture.

ll that can be said is that it is about money in that it is sandwiched between parables about wealth: the prodigal on one side and the story of Lazarus and Dives on the other. Never take a pattern for granted, it usually means something, and clearly Luke saw this as a money parable. But, maybe it’s not! Anyway, you are probably intrigued by now. Perhaps not. Here’s the passage in Luke 16. I’ll see you on the other side.

**Scripture: Luke 16:1-13**

Then Jesus said to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. **2**So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.” **3**Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. **4**I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.” **5**So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?” **6**He answered, “A hundred jugs of olive oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.” **7**Then he asked another, “And how much do you owe?” He replied, “A hundred containers of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill and make it eighty.” **8**And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. **9**And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

**10**‘Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. **11**If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? **12**And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? **13**No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’

**Reflection**

Sometimes you just have to live with the things you don’t understand. Sometimes the mystery is what is important rather than the explanation. It is the very core of sovereignty: the Royals live with a certain degree of mystery. In some way the mystery has been opened up this week, we’ve seen the royals as more human, yet, not quite, with the plethora of traditions and symbolism. When the wonder goes, so does the mystery and the power, thus we use traditions to keep them all in place.

It is the same for faith: we live in the mystery of God. When the enlightenment came along and believed everything could be rationally explained, even God, then how we lived in relationship with God, changed. We became presbyterian and so did the almighty!

Yet, being presbyterian, because it is word based, and debated, is not about a way of governing and explaining things away because I have found the more you explain, the more questions lie underneath, and that is so true for the faith. Anyone who comes to you and says: here’s what this means, ought to go away again and read it in the context of someone else to hear the passage or story in an entirely different way. It is one thing we humbly try and do here, open up these well-known passages, not with the trite well-known explanation, but try and hear it from a different angle.

But no matter what angle you take with today’s passage, I still can’t make sense of it. So, I could just stop here and repeat, there are somethings we’ll never understand and that’s the lesson for today. Now, go and make yourself a cup of tea.

However, perhaps (and there’s my favourite word to use in preaching) it would be useful to retell the parable and invite a different explanation. This version is based on a post by Sarah Dylan Brueur who did a whole degree on this single passage. This reimagining is based on her own.

**A reimagining**

A rich man, living off the income from his estate, hires a manager to run it while he parties. The manager makes sure the tenant farmers keep working to pay off the debt they have accrued. Their grandparents used to own their own land but lost it in payment of debts to the landowner because of exorbitant rents, and now the next generation is living with the consequences, having to buy seed from the company store with whatever is left over after their rent is paid. The harvest is never quite enough so they slip even further into debt.

The steward is one of them. He grew up in one of the families but now works for the owner. Somehow, he manages to work for him without much of a conscience towards his own who suffer under this unjust system.

But there are rumours the manager is squandering the resources of the landowner and is sacked so he is no longer authorised to receive payments. To make matters worse, because he was the owners stooge, he is never going to be accepted back into his original family of tenant farmers.

But the manager isn’t daft. He gathers all the debtors and reduces their debts from something impossible to ever pay off, to something now manageable. The families will have freedom to choose how to live their lives now. Of course, the manager doesn’t tell anyone he doesn’t actually have authority to do this.

But the tenants now see the landowner as being generous, graceful and even a hero, as well as the steward by extension.

The landowner visits to pick up his income and notices that the streets are filled with farmers cheering him on. Wondering what on earth is going on, he keeps his questions to himself, enjoying his new-found and unexpected popularity.

Finding the manager, he discovered what has been going on, that the manager has generously forgiven a lot of the tenants debt, without the owner’s permission which leaves the owner in a bit of a quandary.

The owner could go out and say to the crowds there’s been a mistake, the manager overstepped his authority, and all the cheering would turn to boo-ing and the owner would be left with even more unhappy and even riotous tenants.

He could alternately enjoy the cheers, take the credit, and have happy farmers.

He could punish the manager who could then go to the tenants and tell them what really happened, and they would take him in again.

So, the result is a win for the manager and indeed everyone, but, it is done dishonestly. Up to that point it was fine, but is this what Jesus is suggesting: dishonesty is okay…?

Let’s think what exactly has the manager done: the manager has forgiven debts. The steward may have had no right to do so, but he did it, for personal gain, perhaps, but it was still forgiveness.

The moral? Forgive and it doesn’t matter why. The moral imperative is to forgive. It doesn’t say why or for what reason. Forgiveness is not something anyone keeps a scorecard for. Just do it. It doesn’t actually matter the reason.

As a nation we could forgive debts, as people in relationships we could forgive debts. We don’t have to do it out of love if we aren’t there yet. We could do it because simply we’d like it for ourselves. We’ve experienced what we’re like as unforgiving people, and so we know that refusing to forgive because we don't want the other person to benefit is, as the saying goes, like eating rat poison ourselves hoping it will hurt the rat.

It boils down to the same thing: deluded or sane, selfish or unselfish, there is no bad reason to forgive. Extending the kind of grace God shows us, can only put us all more deeply in touch with that grace as individuals and as a nation.

**Prayer**

Loving God

We hold our nation and our communities and commonwealth at this time

Hold them all in a shared love and apprehension

Recognising it is not an equal place for everyone

We hold each other as a nation mourns

Wondering about itself and what binds us together

And what we can do to bring those further away

Closer

We hold together what hurts and what we give thanks for

In tension and integrity

Finding a way through

Yet, from this place where we are as a nation

We raise our eyes

And see also those beyond us

Who are forced to live in conflict

And who know hunger too readily

And see land change and water disappear from climate change

For those who live uncertain lives

Who face abuse and fear

Who live in unfit homes

We pray

That while our power and wealth is made obvious

In these days of mourning

We find a way that the best of our traditions

Can be shared among the least

And the power we have is found in the way we care

For those who have the least

And so, we gather in prayer

Our families and friends

Those ill mentally and physically

Those grieving their own loved ones

Those fearful of the future

And those worried about the winter

Hear us

So be it

Amen

**Epilogue**

As we prepare ourselves for the funeral, let us pause and reflect and hold on to those things that will take us through this time. Mourning needs to be done together. Grieving is something where we need each other to help us through.

We come together to grieve and move through this period. It is a time of change, but that change is invited because of that which is constant and what is constant is mystery, and wonder and God. And together we move into what is now a new landscape, but we can cope because we are all here together, looking after each other. That is how it is done. That is how futures are made meaningful and possible. Through the grieving into the possibilities.

**Benediction**