**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Mark 6:14-29**

**Sunday 5th February 2023**

**Gathering**

There is a place to meet

Where all is not well

Where folk are trapped

And some are vulnerable

Because of the whims of the powerful

Where all things are not all bright and beautiful

In such a place

There is a story to tell

Of what happens when God’s people

Speak truth to power

And the gospel turns out to be no protection

As the self-appointed take their thrones

A place God listens

To the least of us

As we offer to heaven

The lamentations of the world

And know they are heard

And held

And honoured

Let us gather in just such a place

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of new Kilpatrick Parish… and today… already I bet you feel cheered and effervescent with joy… The church has received the name of being quite a dour place… we’re all miserable… and you leave with a burden rather than a joy…

Obviously, that is a caricature… well, hopefully… but there is in faith… an important and holy place… where we can bring the hurts and the longings… the troubles we wrestle with and the lot in life we have… and cry to God about it… and heaven hears… It is a meeting place with God… with truth… with honest faith… and that’s where we gather to worship today…

**Prayer**

Loving God

The generosity of heaven

And the abundance of hope

In such gift we gather

And find ourselves

Found in you

A safe place for us

In a world that feels less so

A place where silence is enough

When too many contradictory words fight to be heard

Where compassion surrounds us

When conflict feels like the only way

Loving God

In such a place as this

May we centre ourselves

Full ourself es with a pace

Known best to you

Feel the breath of the spirit

Within us

And between us

And make holy this space

Where we tryst with you

(Pause)

Holy God

Holy and generous God

Here we bring ourselves

As we are

And ask you

In a love that is generous and abundant

To lift those weights we carry

Of hurt and prejudice

Of fear and selfishness

And find freedom in your word

And life in your way

And we shape community anew

Each of us alive to what is good

And hopeful

And rich in the diverse colours of peace

Where we can live in the world

With our hope in the kingdom

**Herodias’ Story**

Philip was his name

It was a marriage of convenience.

There was no love between us

But we did have a daughter

Salome.

But when the marriage was no longer convenient

We divorced

And I was married to Antipas

His brother.

But this didn’t go down well

With some of the local religious folk,

One in particular: John the Baptiser.

He was making a nuisance of himself

Commenting on my marriage to Herod Antipas

A divorcee and keeping it in the family.

His comments would have been fine

If it didn’t go much further

But he had a growing following.

He was making them restless.

It was dangerous

To be on the wrong side of his followers

More than we already were.

But this marriage was not my choice.

I was married on to Herod.

I was as trapped as anybody.

John was making what life I had more difficult.

So, the chance came to secure my future

And more importantly

For my daughter.

If John was silenced

We were rid of one chink that would continue to trouble Salome’s life.

So, I persuaded her to dance

The poor thing.

It was an awful ask but had a purpose.

The men were there together.

It was always that way.

The women in their own chambers.

I heard the music

And the cheering.

And then a knock on my door.

”Herod has asked me what I want”

He was drunk and weak enough

To offer half his kingdom

But Salome didn’t know what to ask for.

“The Baptist’s head” I replied.

Without knowing why

That is what she asked for.

Herod hesitated.

Looked round at his wealthy and powerful guests

And didn’t want to lose face,

So he agreed.

The head was delivered on a platter to his guests,

And then at my door

As a sign of his love and loyalty.

It was a moment I felt I had achieved some security for my daughter

Though what kind of mood Herod would be in now

I did not know.

He would be abusive to me for weeks now

But it would be worth the knowledge

Salome would be safer

Despite how awful it made me feel

Asking her to do what she did.

**Scripture Introduction**

That is perhaps one way of reading the story… placing the focus on the women, the least able to change their circumstances… Let us now hear it in the original version… Mark’s version of this is a bit mixed up about who’s who… regardless what you hear… Herodias is the wife of Herod… the daughter… commonly known as Salome… a name given to her by Josephus the Jewish historian… is actually never named in the Bible…

**Scripture Reading Mark 6:14-29**

**Reflection**

The Archers… Star Trek Discovery… The great pottery throw down… the warm spaces art group… and midweek service… Anyone work out the link?… Archers, Star Trek, Pottery Throwdown, art group and midweek service?…

Well, these are the places I go to in order to get cheered up… I can’t do pottery nor paint… Ruairi in the Archers has caused bitterness and anger in his family again… the entire galaxy is threatened by a mysterious randomly moving DMA (Dark Matter Anomaly) in Star Trek… but they are all still a lot cheerier than the persistent headlines of tax inquiries, political bullying, conflict, environmental tipping points, interest rates, Brexit… and presbytery plans…

Where do you go to get cheered up these days?…

I know the church hasn’t always had the reputation of being a jolly place… and in the past at least… a good Scottish Calvinist culture has led us to feel guilty if we laughed here… No longer hopefully…

But sometimes you have to shape a space to acknowledge… Jesus isn’t a happy pill… and there are times when we don’t feel particularly upbeat about things… sometimes we need to express we feel low… disconnected… and recognise faith isn’t a pick-me-up…

Which is where perhaps we find ourselves in today’s story… of Herodias… and the plattered head of the Baptist… It’s not exactly a happy outcome… A young girl is sexualised for a group of men’s entertainment… and there is a negotiation over a decapitation… Some see Herodias are a cruel manipulative Jezebel… (which is the parallel story in the Hebrew scriptures)… some that she is looking after her daughter’s future using the only power she has… regardless of how terrible it is…

Either way… we need to ask… Where is the good news?… Seriously… Why is this story here?… where is the optimism… the hope… the promise… Is there any?

Some believe everything in the bible points to hope… There is always a chink of light… But others… can have a faith that honestly sits there and sees nothing… other than… if you want to speak truth to power… this is what happens… Being faithful to the kingdom… is dangerous… You can get yourself killed… ask John the Baptist… Ask Jesus for that matter…

I once preached on Ecclesiastes 3… a time to live and a time to die etc.… telling the story of someone who was feeling very low… and being an artist… designed his Christmas cards with those words on it… People asked why… He replied… sometimes that is all there is… That is how I feel right now…

And my supervisor… challenged me… “Where is the Good News?”… and I had to say… sometimes there isn’t any… and he wasn’t happy… I made sure my sermons all ended on a high note thereafter for him… but that is not always how people feel… and perhaps does a disservice to faith…

Sometimes there is no moral… just a reality that is difficult… that sets us adrift… that disconnects us from what once brought us strength and hope…

But… and this is why I love the bible… all that’s there… in the pages of this holy book… we call the good news… This is perfectly legitimate… this is honest… this is faithful… to have words… that recognise sometimes there is no good news… not yet…

There are books in the bible we are invited to read… when we are in places we are at the moment… a country that just feels broken… and morally empty… devoid of any vision close to compassion…

And sometimes we can’t end on a high note… sometimes it feels as those disciples of John felt at the end of this story… and it would do a disservice to our faith and our humanity… to spin some twee silver lining… Rather the bible gives us stories and words to accompany us in these times…

When we are in that place… there is one thing to hold on to… this is not where it ends… this is not the last word…

**Lamentations**

The words you are going to hear were written in the echo of the exile to Babylon of the people of Jerusalem… Jerusalem’s streets are empty… tumbleweed rolls… and God is no longer in the temple… Too whom do we cry now?… Who will hear us?… It is that feeling of loss… the bible invites us to admit to… and offers it as a holy and sacred act… It is real… it is honest… it is how God’s people felt then… and are allowed to admit they feel today… You are invited to pause now and be honest and know it is not inappropriate… or unfaithful to feel that way… and to voice it all to heaven…

How lonely sits the city

    that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
    she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
    has become a vassal.

She weeps bitterly in the night,
    with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers
    she has no one to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
    they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into exile with suffering
    and hard servitude;
she lives now among the nations,
    and finds no resting-place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
    in the midst of her distress.

The roads to Zion mourn,
    for no one comes to the festivals;
all her gates are desolate,
    her priests groan;
her young girls grieve,
    and her lot is bitter.

Her foes have become the masters,
    her enemies prosper,
because the Lord has made her suffer
    for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away,
    captives before the foe.

**News**

**Prayers**

We bring what hurts in the world

When we don’t know what else to do

And place it here in the grace that is God

That pain we feel when we read about Ukraine

And how the powerful get away with so much arrogance

That sadness we share with those without homes

Fleeing for safety or dreams and not welcomed anywhere

The sorrow that fills us when we hear of hunger

And trade that is always tilted towards the rich

The heaviness of heart shared with those who are ill

In a system that cannot cope in being undervalued

The regret of choices made in the past

That have not lived up to the promises of today

The woe of a politics that has lost its way

And the difficulty of leading through every crisis

The longing for family and friends

And the fullness of life they each deserve

We bring what hurts in the world

When we don’t know what else to do

And place it here in the grace that is God

**Benediction**