**New Kilpatrick**

**YouTube**

**12th February 2023**

**Mark 7:24-37**

**Gathering**

We don’t need to cross borders to be here this morning

We don’t need to speak out to be let in

We don’t need to persuade anyone we are welcome here

That has not always been the case

God’s people have, and still do,

Find exclusion clauses and exemptions in holy doctrine

It is anathema to heaven

Yet it was found out the hard way

When Jesus met a Syrophoenician woman

Today we meet her as well

Welcome to worship

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and we gather round another difficult story… that ultimately broadens out the welcome of heaven… But it was a hard lesson to learn… something quite existential for Jesus… Yet it was how he managed it… and grew from it… that uncovers a truth… let us gather round it in worship…

**Prayer**

Loving God

May we find you pulling us closer

In the space between us

May we recognise your call

To bind ourselves to each other

Welcome the stranger

Open our table to the least

Speak on behalf of the silenced

And be taught by those we have forgotten

In such a space as this

In the rich diversity of heaven

And that tensegrity of faith

May we meet you

And find such a place

A growing space

A generous space

A place called home

And in your love

Greater that all things

Shaped in Jesus

And known in community

May we find a safe space

To be ourselves

All we are

All the secrets we hide

The worries he have

The insights we bring

And anger we manage

The real us

And know it is that person

Less than perfect

Yet honestly here

That is loved and blessed and called

To be the good news for others

Offer it

Invite it

Give it away

Generously

And in such hope

And faithful longing

May we do so

Here and wherever we find ourselves

Hear us as we share the Lord’s Prayer

**Two Stories**

Here’s two stories you’ll recognise but perhaps not realise quite the similarity. These are words straight from the bible. This is the story as the bible tells it. All that has been done is we’ve woven them together to make the similarities more obvious.

A: There was a huge crowd of people from the area

B: A huge crowd of people some from a great distance

A: Gathered to listen

B: and Jesus had compassion on them

A: He had compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd

B: because they were with him three days with nothing to eat

A: They were in a lonely place

B: They were in the desert

A: And there was no food

B: No food

A: The hour was late

B: and the hour was now very late

A: and the disciples asked what shall we feed them

B: And Jesus said: “YOU feed them”

A: YOU feed them

B: And they wondered what they should do

A: when a child was found with some food

B: and they brought him to Jesus

A: there were five loaves and two fish

B: there were seven loaves and a few fish

A: and the crowds sat down on the green grass in groups

B: They sat down on the ground and Jesus gave thanks

A: Jesus looked up to heaven

B: he broke the loaves

A: he blessed and broke the loaves

B: and he gave it to the disciples to feed the people

A: He gave it to the disciples to feed the people and there were 12 baskets left over

B: and at the end of the meal there were 7 baskets left over

A: 5000 men had been fed

B; 4000 people were fed

**And in the middle, a third: Mark 7:24-30**

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ But she answered him, ‘Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ Then he said to her, ‘For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.’ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

**Reflection**

I have a friend who finds it impossible to make up her mind… Genuinely… If we are out for a meal… or even a coffee… she’ll go round the table and ask everyone what they’re having before choosing the same as someone else… Rarely has she chosen something uniquely for herself…

I don’t know if not being able to make up our minds is actually a constantly changing mind… unable to settle on any one thing…

Changing your mind is really not the done thing these days… Politicians try and avoid headlines that scream U-Turn… but sometimes… of course… you have to change your mind… when contrary evidence or wisdom presents itself…

The intriguing question is… did Jesus ever change his mind… I do especially round this story…

Here’s Jesus… taking some down time… wanders into Gentile territory… into Samaria… and we know culturally what Jews and Samaritans thought of each other… when he is approached by a woman whose daughter is unwell…

“Help my daughter” she asks… and Jesus… in a dark moment of cultural racism… says to her… “Let the children be fed first!”… which means… the Jews… they are first… That’s who he came to save…

“It is not fair for the children’s food to be thrown to the dogs”… This is hard stuff… Jesus in throwing a cultural slur at the child who is writhing under the possession of a demon… or whatever you wish to understand as her illness… calling her a dog… is saying they aren’t good enough…

And it is a cultural slur… Jesus is using something quite racist…

Now… here’s where the arguments start… was Jesus being racist?… He is the son of God… He was perhaps just challenging the woman… who got what he was doing and played along with a clever repost… “Even the dogs eat the crumbs”… which was insightful enough for Jesus to heal the child… though it seems a bit low for Jesus to play this game… calling an ill child a dog… Dogs were not Andrex puppies but scavengers… They weren’t kept as pets…

Perhaps…

Or maybe Jesus… the human… who grew up a Jew… and had all the cultural issues we all have towards neighbours… Scots and English… Catholic and Protestant to name a few…

And this woman… throws his words back at him… creating an existential moment Jesus realises he is limiting the good news to just Israel… In fact… the story is bigger… salvation is bigger…

The jury is out and we can all make up our own minds about what is going on… But what is perhaps more interesting… is what Jesus then does with this realisation… which takes us back to the two stories of the feeding of the crowds…

The first story takes place before he meets the Syrophoenician woman… he feeds the crowd of 5000… and all of them Jews… the children he mentions to the woman…

But after this moment… he doesn’t go back onto home turf… he takes the very long way home… traveling through Gentile territory… and repeats all the miracles and healings he has done up to now in Jewish territory… but on Gentile territory… He gets to grips with this racism and opens up the kingdom to all these others… and the story of the feeding of the 4000… is exactly the same story as before… but the entire crowd is Gentile…

It’s something we don’t often notice… It is as if Jesus has had this epiphany… compassion is more important than tradition… Jesus does the most difficult thing for those of us born into the unfortunate privilege of dominance or prejudice. He listens. And allows himself to be fundamentally changed… and almost repeats what he does in Sidon… everything he did in Israel…

He is no hard-core racist… He is not reluctant to abandon his preconceived notions…

This man internalises what he has learned… and puts his house in order… someone humble enough to grow…

Faith in a saviour who changes his mind and grows the kingdom… dare we follow this growing kingdom…

**Confessing and Dedicating**

A quiet time to pause… to reflect… to voice to God those things we need to confess… that bias we have against some… because of language… asylum seekers… sexuality… religion or political party… These are big things… we can’t let them go instantly… but like Jesus… to recognise them… and how that bias limits God’s love… and our freedom to love each other… is a starting place…

Jesus listens to the woman… and allows himself to be fundamentally changed… ,let us dedicate ourselves to being changed… enlarged… growing a bigger… wider vision… of a kingdom that celebrates its breadth…

Creator

May we know we stand in a kingdom

Where all are fed the bread and fish

Where there is abundance and generosity

For Jew and gentile

Binary and non-binary

Young and old

Stranger and friend

May we know the limitless kingdom

Held by a limitless love

Beyond borders and tradition

And shaped by compassion

Towards this vision

We dedicate ourselves

And our community

So be it

Amen

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

You heal

You hear

You hold

You help

And it is in that trust

That place of love

We bring our prayers today

That the world enlarges its hope

And recognises the gifts of all

And makes a welcome space of grace

For all of your children

Of every culture, faith, tradition and religion

We gather here in the needs of so many

As we watch pictures from Syria and Turkey

And the loss that is being felt

And the fear and the grief and the hurt

We pause because we don’t have the words…

Here together as one community

We bring the needs of so many who cross borders

Who make themselves strangers in new lands

Because of conflict and poverty and hunger

We pause and bring them here

We bring here in community

Ukraine, and Russia, Yemen, and Haiti

Too many where too much damage is done

To our humanity and relationships and future

We pause and pray

And our families, those who mean so much to us

Those who do not have worries to seek

The ill and the grieving

Those mentally and physically unwell

Those who have faced prejudice

And fear because they do not fit into some norm

We pause and clear a space for them all

Loving God

Heal us

Hear us

Hold us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**

**Sung Amen**

**Doxology**