**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Matthew 23:1-12**

**5th November 2023**

**Gathering**

Come down

Come down from high seats

Top tables

Places of honour

Come down from directors’ chairs

Laird’s balcony

Royal thrones

Come down

And be here

Where the gospel touches the world

And find the pavement side

Where Jesus waits

To tell the story of love

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton… the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and thank you for the space to meet … and worship together… and create community… But what kind of community? … In some way that’s today’s question… What kind of community? … In the gospels we are offered quite a number of examples of community… not always the ones to model… and today we meet at the crossing point between one way of being a religious community and another and Jesus and the Pharisees clash again, and Jesus has some strong words after being the recipient of the Pharisees tricky questions… In that tensegrity… we worship…

**Prayer**

Loving God

Generous God

May we find you everywhere we are

In the lay-bys and by-ways

The meeting places of our lives

And there celebrate all you are

God of the common folk

The grounded

The workers of the vineyard

And may we remove the vestments

That elevate us

And hear our names

As you hear them

In the voice of someone

Who has known a stable

Lived in homelessness

Walked the roads

And died on a rubbish dump

That we might create a community

Held by the kingdom,

And shaped in love

And shared with everyone

All who have a place

A seat

An invitation

To belong

Here

And now

Loving God

Take us for who we are

There is no false pride here now

We have been found out

Here you look on us all

As we really are

And we give thanks

And seek forgiveness

That we might be renewed

Called again

Into people of the way

The way of truth

The way of compassion

The way of community

Hear us as we share the Lord’s Prayer

**Scripture Introduction**

You might feel the shift

The moment Jesus, facing the religion leaders

With their questions about tax and resurrection and rules

Turned his back no them

He’d had enough of their games

Being answerable to them

A game of trick questions

A game they felt they lost

Not that Jesus felt he’d won

He’d just had enough.

This was going nowhere

So, he turned his back on them

And turned towards the crowd

Watching

Unsure

Confused

“Do whatever they teach you and follow it,”

He said to them

Pointing to the Pharisees in all their garb

“But do not do as they do,

for they do not practice what they teach.

They’ve got time to manage all the rituals

They don’t live in the real world.

With their rules and phylacteries

They need their deeds to be seen

And talked about

That’s an achievement to them

A bigger achievement than honouring God”

It’s the moment religion is exposed

Underneath those fine prayer shawls,

Found in the top seats

Very public displays of temple tasks

There isn’t very much

Listen to how it happens…

**Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12**

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, **2**“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’s seat; **3**therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. **4**They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. **5**They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. **6**They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues **7**and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them rabbi. **8**But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. **9**And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven. **10**Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. **11**The greatest among you will be your servant. **12**All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

**Reflection**

Ministers of the Church of Scotland… apparently… are the only clergy who are legally allowed to wear their clerical garb outside in the streets…

It’s not something you’ll find me doing inside… let alone outside… except at Halloween… when the closest cultural connection anyone makes is that you’ve come as Darth Vader… They certainly don’t recognise you as a minister…

The advantage of such an outfit is that it can keep you a little warmer in cold churches… and I grew up in one… and I remember my minister talking about this uniform…

But the only thing that made sense to me was the cassock… because the idea of it is that it equalises you… covers up status, rank, position so that in preaching the word… you are neutral…

But then we go and add a preaching gown and a degree hood, and we change the colour to red… all of which confers status and reputation… though I confess… I did love wearing my gown… at first… mainly because it made me feel less Darth Vadar and more batman coming down the aisle…

But here is where Jesus enters the scene… and says… “Really!?… Did you not hear what I said?” … and he brings all that cultural status we allow in religion and church… down to earth…

“Where, in anything said in the gospel… is your religion, your theology, your creeds… talked about in terms of status… before it is talked about in terms of love: love God and love of neighbour” …

And we all agree… of course we do…

But there is a subtlety here in what we actually believe… that has fallen into the same trap… where we speak of salvation… and redemption… in terms of the saved… the believers… Believe a certain thing… and you’ll get to heaven… Speak of the cross in a certain way… and you’ll be saved…

That’s not Jesus speak… That’s church speak… a certain status given to folk who get their theology right… you are saved… and to others who don’t agree with that theology… then… well how did the Pharisees fare? …

What frightens me most in the church… is that as we grow smaller… and our status declines… the church itself feels more conservative… more emphasis on rules… less ambition to take risks… and thinking outside the lines…

It is a tragedy the church thinks it controls the hereafter… giving access to those who believe the right things… hold to the right creeds… or have made the right lifestyle choices…

Just to let you know that what we did last week at communion… was probably illegal in church law… We opened our table to everyone… of any age… faith or none… We didn’t ask for intent… or instructed on what any of that meant… We unfenced the table… and it was good… but it wasn’t legal…

Because… we don’t exist for ourselves… our own wellbeing… our own future even… Our whole purpose is only to love God and love neighbour… now…

To that… we give of ourselves fully… We give ourselves to our neighbour… our neighbour does that towards us… That is how it works… and you know… doing church like that… in community… where my salvation is tied up in your salvation… everybody wins…

That’s why we try to have such an outwards focus here… Or we keep trying to do so… and God loves a trier… but we do… community is our salvation… where everything we do is open to everyone, we meet… Like our table… we don’t exist for our own wellbeing… or tell a story of a salvation just for the few… or our own version of the story… of predestination… ransoms… atonement… but rather understand salvation is mixed up with the relationships we have with our neighbour… It is a community…

And to be honest… for me… that’s enough… It’s messy… the rules are few… and we don’t know how to do it well… we’re constantly failing and learning… but church isn’t perfect… it’s practice… and that feels right… To all those knocked back… hurt… bruised… we practice being a loving neighbour… thinking more deeply with them… dreaming more often with them… doing more living with them…

We get it wrong… but that’s okay… we don’t hold ourselves up as a perfect example… What saps our living… is the **fear** of getting it wrong… Let us just go and love God… go and love neighbour… with an open gospel… generous… free … and proclaim it wherever we can… with lavish acts of love…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Just as we are

As we really are

We place in the midst of us

The needs of all people

For peace that lasts

For grace that overcomes

For justice that prevails

For evil to be vanquished

For pain to be gone

For humanity to be found

And for that great dream

To begin in the love of God

And the loving of neighbour

And in that dream, we place

Gaza and Israel and West Bank

Ukraine and Syria and Yemen

Somalia, Sudan, and Tigray

And everywhere

Too many ‘everywhere’s’

Lat us lay down our confidence tricks

And our false securities

And our power dressing and politics

And admit to who we are

Lesser

Broken

Worried

That we might partner

And be partnered by

The poor, the least, the broken

The hungry and homeless

On the wrong side of the economy and policy

Of climate change and trade

And may all our prayers begin

In the love of God

And the love of neighbour

Without a programme

Or a project

Just a messy

Honest

Real

Human response

To all our need

To find each other again

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**