**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**17th September 2023**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

**Gathering**

No one

Is welcome here

Because we already belong

So let us

Every one of us

Every background and experience

Every shape and colour

Accent and hairstyle

Eye pigment and jawline

God has ever imagined

Let us be here

In this belonging place

And celebrate

Everyone

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for making space in your day for us, to share this time together, a time when we reflect on worship, what it is we do together. It is a thing that defies much definition and far more experience and emotion. It is over three years since we began this video version of worship. We’ve never taken it into church because I always feel there is more you can do to offer an encounter with God than a recording of a church service. Watching from a distance may bring familiarity but perhaps less of an engaging experience. This more informal way of making community, you and me, and the imagined others also watching, offers a richer experience perhaps. The same words as in the sanctuary but offered differently, to suit the context in which we listen. Let us worship.

**Prayer**

May we pause within this world

And in silence and in word

Find the silences and the words

You hear, O God

In the corridors of heaven

May we be your people here

And shape a beatitudinal community

Beyond the rules of the world

And recognise the gift of the kingdom

Where all belong

May we find our voice, O God

And let it speak truth and compassion

Trusting you hear every one

And recognise the cry we make

That holds our hurt and our need

May we make a place of trust

Where your love and justice

Shapes all we are

And all we will be

And that strength is enough of each of us

May we together, O God

In this holy and earthly community

Be the conduit of the spirit

That she might pour into the world

The hope of the future

And love for today

**Scripture Introduction**

It wasn’t meant to be this reading this morning. We were offered instead, with the lectionary we use, the story of Deborah, the judge, sitting under a palm tree waiting for battle, or some of Paul’s words about women being silent in church and men doing all the praying. You have to recognise that we have moved away from some passages, and they no longer make easy reading without a lot of explanation and apologising.

We will come back to them some other time, but here, as we continue a theme on worship, we read the beatitudes, because it is about the diversity and inclusivity of the kingdom. These lines recognise the variety of humanity that God called blessed. Blessed is a way of giving of self so that others might have fuller lives, so if God sees these as blessed, in giving who they are, the poor, the meek, the children, the peacemakers, then what they give is something the kingdom gifts to the world.

This diversity in the beatitudes seems to be the key ingredient the kingdom speaks of. Compare this to the key ingredients the world seeks.

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12**

**Reflection**

How often do we pause and look around at us all… in awe… of the folk we worship with… and wonder how magnificent it is we are together?

How much time do we spend marvelling at our diversity… the life experiences that have shaped the deep wisdom of this community… the pain collectively shared with those we hardly know… the choices and crises that have brought some of us to our knees and other singing among the mountains… the secrets we hold about ourselves, we cannot voice for fear of the judgement of others: the quietly gay, straight, non-binary, divorced, doubter, mentally ill, uncertain who we are in the world… or the concerns we hold about others that just ravage our peace and fill our anxieties… yet this thing we are together… the community we shape… the worship we create together…

Have we ever marvelled at how it is we… fit in together… and worship here?…

A wee story… off the back of Alex being inducted soon in Oban… When I was invited to be sole nominee here… I really worried if I’d had done the right thing… This was New Kilpatrick!… This was the big church… My colleagues physically paused when I told them… Genuinely… They didn’t know how to respond… New Kilpatrick???

How are you going to fit in there? …

But I have told my colleagues… you got the place so wrong… You weren’t actually talking about New Kilpatrick’s character… you were talking about your own… and the prejudices we all hold because of our presumptions… “You won’t fit in!” … well, no one is asking anyone to fit in… It’s a bit more meaningful than that…

One of our regular themes is about belonging… being a belonging church is far and away more gospel-shaped than being a welcoming church… Everyone belongs whether we like it or not… We belong before we believe…

Welcome… is conditional… belonging, unconditional… We welcome our guests… but there is an implication… this is our place, and you are guests here… hopefully you’ll fit in… and become one of us… But… do we welcome a member of our own family back into the home… No, they already belong…

The sociologist Brené Brown said recently… “The opposite of belonging… is fitting in… Fitting in is about assessing a situation… and becoming who you need to be to be accepted… Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to **change** who we are… it requires us to **be** who we are”…

Belonging celebrates this marvellous diversity… and that diversity is the image of God…Worship happens… as a community… where everyone is themselves… and celebrates that diverse image of God… we give worth to the breadth and depth of God’s bold imagination…

Now… I am the first to say that has not always been the case for everyone here… Let’s not be naive… Getting ‘belonging’ right is difficult… It criticises us, impeaches us, deconstructs us… it challenges us…

But in celebrating everyone… the more our community reflects God’s diversity… the more our worship gives worth to God’s image… Which is what worship means… Worth-ship…

So, our worship is founded not on the welcome offered… but the belonging we know… No need to fit in… just be ourselves…

This is our good news… seriously good… because there is a generation of people in Scotland, and beyond… who are adopting a way of life that is lonely… disconnected… where they live with others who share only the same values, thoughts, and ideas as themselves… Those who think differently… are not neighbours to love…

It is a generation uncertain about how to make community in its richest sense… a fit-in community rather than one you belong to… I was listening to a podcast from the BBC about Adam Smith… you should listen to it… because it illustrates the Scottish enlightenment as a time of diverse and critical thinking… where in the coffee houses you would have these great debates between natural scientists and anthropologists… mathematicians… and theologians… moral philosophers and political thinkers… what used to be the core tradition of a Scottish education… and from that breadth grew a democracy of morality and ethics and a sense of belonging together…

That was our church too… the General Assembly a great national melting pot of ideas… rather than the dullest grey of church today… with no real sense we belong anywhere or to anyone…

And it frightens me that the Church’s mission is shaped round the idea of welcome… which is conditional on our own terms… and is less about creating communities of belonging… which is unconditional and richly diverse… Maybe the greatest thing we can do for the mission of the kingdom… is simply continue to focus on creating here a place of grace-filled belonging… and the diversity and openness that requires…

Look around us… despite our intent… the truth is… we are all terribly similar… we’re generally white… skinned and haired… in the second half of our years… me included… but in having a mission to become a community of belonging… not of fit-ins… we lay the foundation for a future congregation that is creative… imaginative… and celebrates God’s image… offers God our worth… offers God… our worship…

**Epilogue**

A belonging place

How do we belong together?

Such diversity of opinions

Each of us speaks differently of God

Or love

Or spirit

Or presence

Because we do not all share the same experience of God

A belonging place

Where each of us holds different questions

With integrity

About history

And legend

What is literal

And what has grown in the telling

Where each of us flows between truth and myth

In telling our stories

Of water walking

Of storm stilling

Of crowd feeding

Of stone rolling

Truth or myth:

Which one holds more meaning

About our human condition?

How might we listen to others

And be listened to by others

In a place where all belong?

Belonging:

A generous place

A disturbing place

A respectful place

And honest place

In the rich diversity of paths

And the plethora of words

And the tangle of meaning,

In there,

Where we let ourselves be unwound a little

In the presence of others

Who graciously support us by holding our fraying threads

In there

We know we belong

Because we are loved for who we are

**Benediction**