**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**John. 8:1-11**

**5th March 2023**

**Gathering**

He drew in the sand

A line

A word

A border

Daring the rule-makers

To cross

In the name of love

But they turned

Dropping their legalistic boulders

With an unholy thud

And walked away from the woman

They chose to stone

The line remained

As did the woman

“Did no one cross?” He asked

Already knowing the answer

“No!”

He raised his eyebrows

Then go into life

And return life with life

Lived to the full

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of new Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for inviting us into this time of worship. We gather today round a story traditionally about forgiveness and indeed it still is. But it is also more. And it is in the more that we gather, ready to stretch what we are familiar with in order to find something new. Such is the way of faith: always new, always an invitation to find meaning in what we do not understand or find familiar. Let us worship together.

**Prayer**

Holy God

Holy and gracious God

We call on you

As you call on us

And together

In this holy space we make

We pause and hold a silence

That speaks that which we cannot say

Of our wonder

Of our confession

Of our questions

And may we listen

For we know we are far from perfect

But we are human

Fully so

And are mixed up

Between faith and folly

Between the sacred and secular

It is in that place we seek you

And know you seek us

May we find each other

Holy God

Holy and gracious God

And in grace

And in hope

And in love

Build a deeper relationship

With you

And with each other

A forgiving place

A renewing place

A resurrection place

For us all

Hear us

In the prayer that connects us all

**Scripture Background**

An interesting wee story today, one that no one really knows the origin of since it doesn’t appear in the earliest manuscripts… left out… according to some… because it showed Jesus encouraging adultery…

It is probably just a late story in the canon… one that came back into memory after the first manuscripts were written…

But it is intriguing that it was therefore included when many other stories weren’t… What did the early church see in this story that opened up their understanding of Jesus that was important enough for it to be included…

Which is one question to ask and we’ll explore that… but the other question is what was Jesus drawing in the sand?… no one can really know… Some suggest the sins of the woman… others, the names of her accusers… Another idea is that he was echoing Roman law, and writing firstly her crime… adultery… and secondly her sentence… death… But the words were temporary, scuffed out by the feet of her accusers as they shuffled away… So, it becomes an emblem of forgiveness: sins aren't written in concrete, but in dust…

Either way we don’t know… we only have this late story… but even being late to the gospel… it is early with a truth we are invited to hear…

**Scripture: John 8:1-11**

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them.

The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, “Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?” They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, “The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone.” Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. “Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?”

“No one, Master.”

“Neither do I,” said Jesus. “Go on your way. From now on, don’t sin.”

**From another point of view**

They were quite eager to stone me.

Champing at the bit, they were.

Making an example of me

Would distract eyes from falling on them;

They’d keep their high and mighty position

Hiding behind their unholy anger.

You could almost hear them laugh.

In fact they did,

When they asked him the question

About me.

He paused too long in answering.

Sitting there in front of them,

Back stooped,

Face down,

Hair falling over his beard,

He doodled in the sand.

I watched his finger carve its way through the dust.

So did they.

Time stopped.

Eased.

The anger dulled a little.

Until he answered them:

“Stone her!”

And I froze.

“If you are without sin,” he added.

And there was muttering.

You could hear their high quality cloth

Shift under their awkwardness.

And then I heard a stone thud on the ground.

Then another,

And another,

As the holy men are forced to admit their unholiness.

It was a clever question

Because they couldn’t say no,

And as the last one departed

He spoke again:

“Go now, be without sin.”

And that’s how he saved my life,

And gave me hope.

**Reflection**

We have a great wee Sunday School… but it is wee… unlike the days of 100 in each department… and… my friends… we will never be there again… Churches across the whole western world have a critical lack of young people… Why can’t anyone… engage with them…

My daughter’s generation is quite foreign to many of us… We watch children… and grandchildren… with fascination on their iPads… smart phones… with awe… They just get what we find incomprehensible…

But… give them a photocopier… Gen Z can’t cope… It’s a line in the sand… Indeed, I was reading an article about how some avoid them altogether… because such machines are illogical… you have to learn to use them… You can’t just pick up and go with them… like an app… such as instagram or tiktok… which take only a matter of seconds…

And it fascinates those who remember their first television… how someone today can do their entire job on a smart phone…

But technology isn’t really what stands out about millennials… It is something far more faithful and generous… there is a great openness with that generation… an acceptance of everyone… and they are appalled by injustice, exclusiveness, sexism, ageism…

And that is where there is a connection with faith… because Jesus is the one who is equally appalled by such things… challenging the righteous… satisfied with their traditions… and rules… and clauses… and exclusions… which is where we meet him in our story…

We have a bundle of pharisees… usually the good guys… but human also… and Jesus brings them down to earth… with a reality check… that their high and mighty morality… doesn’t befit them… behind the exhibition of the rules… is a fear and a prejudice towards this woman… All have sinned in the story… only one knows it…

So if those of the generation we call Millennials… have an openness that feels quite Jesus-like… why are they not found in church?… They are the most open and generous generation towards everyone we tend to deem different… and perhaps that is the issue…

Look at how the church has fallen out over sexuality, divorce, single parenthood, etc… and has been broken… over issues my daughter’s generation doesn’t give a tinker’s curse about… except to make sure everyone’s worth is recognised and valued… I know that is hard… and awkward for us… a foreign land…

Talking of foreign lands… new presbytery mission plans are being completed… and only this week the latest draft for Clyde has been finally published…

All the plans are designed as mission plans… but the long-toothed cynic in me sees that as a design to keep the church going as it is… That is not the challenge the church faces today… Mission plans will never attract millennials… because we don’t speak their inclusive language… We debate and lose ourselves in things that that generation have moved on from generations ago…

Our challenge is to find some connectedness… some language… that tells our story of the justice of God… the inclusivity of God… the love of God… the line drawn in the sand… that the pharisees would never cross… but Jesus did… all the time… for the sake of others… a way of sharing that story… that is theirs and should be ours…

But when you read the story of Jesus… not the story the church tells of Jesus… with definitions… and rules… but the story before these things came along… few find a story where there was a line in the sand… of which God said thus far and no further…

We are not yet a church like that… Look at us tear ourselves apart over women leadership… sexuality… even what bread and wine means… and mission plans don’t make us a better orientated church… It is just a management plan…

Ours, then, is to be locally… God’s people who can say to those who do not fit… well you fit here… learning from the generation that isn’t here…

For it is a mission not to get people back to church… Our mission is Jesus’ mission… learning to love those we have in the past rejected… those we love beyond the rules we make… with a language that speaks about the love of God and not the judgement of God… the love of God and not the condemnation of God… the love of God and not the exclusivity of God…

I don’t know what Jesus wrote in the sand… none of us do… when I reimagine the story… I imagine Jesus drawing a line… one the pharisees would not cross… and then I see Jesus standing up… and stepping over it… to hug the woman… and perhaps there is the mission we have as a congregation … crossing the lines we have drawn around God in the past…

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

May we cross lines together

Always towards peace and justice and love

May we cross the line too that truth is spoken in the world

And the world rebalances itself towards the light

So we bring here

Those darknesses

Of conflict and hunger and injustice

That we might shift everything

To make the kingdom possible

Ukraine and Russia

For peace and a new way of living together

Turkey and Syria

For a rebuilding of community and lives

For food poverty across the world and in our own communities

And a new priority to care for the least

Those living with prejudice because of fear

And for a new-found way to talk to each other

The church and its planned-for future

And for a renewed vision of who she is and can be

Our families and friends

Those with mental and physical ill health

For those feeling confused in the world

And uncertain of too much

Loving God

May we cross the line we have not dared to do so far

To open up a world that welcomes the least and lost

And encourages us to challenge and stretch ourselves

In faith, in hospitality, in love

Hear our prayer, O God

Who says to us

There is no line you will not cross for us

Such is the love you have

May that be our church, our living, our faith

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**