**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**14th August 2022**

**Genesis 25:7-11**

**Gathering**

Abraham has always been old

He started old

And he’s just got older

75 when we first met him

And full of promise

He’s now in the twilight of his years

A 100 years ago

Ishmael and Isaac

Quickened his hopes for the future

But now Abraham dies

He takes another wife

Keturah

It feels like a postscript

A footnote in his story

But footnotes are doorways

Into other stories

And possibilities

Today we dare explore one of them

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for the chance to meet again and worship together online…

It’s the last chapter of Abraham today, but in some way it is one of the more intriguing moments in his story… The bible offers us a line or two about his final years… but there are a whole bundle of stories told about the gaps in the original tale, called the Midrash, moral stories and hopeful commentaries that bring this small footnote of a story to life and today we tell those tales. Welcome to worship.

**Prayer**

Loving God

Beyond all stories

And held within then all

May we dance with you through them

Meet ourselves in them

Find fresh faith in hearing them

A faith of stories

Of relationships

Of hope

Of engaging with life

And all life’s realities

And mysteries

And may we meet each other

In our own stories

Tangle with our neighbour

In place and time

And find those meeting places

To connect

And be people of hope

And light

And grace

Loving God

When we refuse to listen to each other

Or disparage someone else’s story

When we find our prejudices

And come across our own narrowness

May we tell the story of forgiveness

Of redemption

Of renewal and rebirth

You tell us every day

That we might find ourselves

And each other again

And enjoy the diversity and grace

Of your kingdom once more

We give thanks

And we covenant to be your people again

Together

Sharing the story of faith

And hope

And justice

In the world

Hear us as we share the global prayer together

**Scripture Background**

There are a lot of names in this passage. It’s the kind of passage no one wants to read lest the names are pronounced all wrong. But that isn’t important. What is important is this short insight into Abraham’s life after Sarah’s death. Abraham made sure Isaac was married and then you’d have thought he’d put his feet up. But no! He’s marries again, and then goes on to have 6 children. Is was such a long struggle for him the first 100 years. He’s now 175 and there is a whole tribe born, actually six tribes and there is a story all about that too… Genesis 25:1-11 an adapted version omitting many of the names.

**Reading**

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. **2**She bore him six sons, and these six had children, all of them descendants of Keturah **5**Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. **6**But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

This is the length of Abraham’s life, one hundred seventy-five years. **8**Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, old and full of years, and was gathered to his people. **9**His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, **10**the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. **11**After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

**Reflection**

If you ever wished to be a politician in this day and age… a vote winning idea is to tell a different narrative of what is happening… It is a populist trick played well by certain populist politicians about everything except themselves being fake… Mr Trump, for example, saying the FBI raid on his home was to stop his possible second run for president… rather than he allegedly had documents he should have…

Closer to home there is the narrative of Brexit and influx of migrants, or £350 million spent on the NHS weekly… each offering a alternative view that stands against the more rational understanding of events… They are used to divide people… set people against each other… because it is either one version or the other… and the story is powerful and it works…

The bible knows that too… but the generosity of the bible offers a variety of stories but they aren’t set against each other… they are woven together… so you get various points of views… The stories’ of Abraham we’ve been exploring over the last couple of months is case in point… It feels like one narrative but it is a whole bundle of different stories, that have been brought together… each tribe of Israel having their own versions of the tales and the compilers of the bible have brought them together into one narrative without saying one is more important than the other…

For example… the story of Hagar and Ishmael… Ishmael must be about 16 years old… but the story tells us he was a child and Hagar left him under a bush… The bible allows the contradiction to stand because truth is not found in the facts, but in the story…

It is a generous and mature thing for our faith to do, to allow different versions of the story to stand together… and exist alongside each other… even speaking into each other…

Jewish tradition goes further with this ability to hold different versions of a story together… It is called the Midrash… which are commentaries and stories and moral tales that fill in some of the gaps between the stories… There is one for Issac after the attempted sacrifice where the bible says only Abraham came down the mountain… What happened to Isaac… One Midrashic tale has him going down the other side of the mountain never to speak to Abraham again so traumatised and angry he was…

As we conclude the story of Abraham… there is an interesting story of him marrying again… to a woman called Keturah… who bore him 6 children… We hardly know this woman… and the Jewish midrash wonders about who she is… and one thought that grows up is that Keturah is actually Hagar… renamed…

She is mentioned in a later book of the bible: Chronicles… where she is called Abraham’s concubine… singular… and the Midrash suggests this is therefore Hagar because she was the concubine of Abraham

Keturah means incense… and Hagar has been renamed… because of her actions since being dismissed by Sarah and Abraham… The story goes that the grandchildren of the six children she bore Abraham grew into the tribes of Islam… while the great grandsons of Isaac grew into the tribes of Israel…

Now, while we cannot say this is in any way literal history… there is something about the way we tell our stories that shape us… and offer an invitation into a future that can be quite different… that right in the heart of the texts of our faith… we find places we can meet each other… rejoice in our joint heritage… find our narratives bring us closer together, rather than divide us…

When we want a narrative to shape our politics… I’d choose the bible or almost any other faith text… than then populist myths that we are using now to shape our relationships with our neighbours, communities and world…

**Meditation**

It started with a hope

Packing up a successful life

And removing it all to a destination

Abram didn’t yet know

Then came the stars

Constantly weighing him down

each constellation a promise

named after children he didn’t yet have

Then he found his own name wasn’t big enough

So God grew it

With the sound of laugher: Abra**HA**m

But the punchline was yet unknown

Sarah found no funny side

Overhearing the men talk of her

Without consent or thought for her wellbeing

A frightened mother at 90, unsure for her safety

And Hagar, the foreign slave

The forced handmaid of Abraham’s future

The one who bore a son

Then sent to die by a jealous wife frightened by what might be

And the golden child of laughter

Left with nothing to say to his father

After that day of terror on the mountain

It’s long shadow shaping the dysfunction of his own sons

Yet we call him a patriarch of promise

With a lesson in the laughter

Beyond the chaos of this moment

Lies the long unfinished hope of the kingdom

**News**

**Prayer**

We pray for those in the gaps

Between the headlines

Those who have lost their voice

In the noise of another’s ambition

Those who will worry over energy

While others worry over winning

For those who find themselves in conflict

And would rather share peace

For a world that feels in crisis

And doesn’t know how to change

The environment’s long tip towards our unsustainability

And the short-termism of our politics

For the difference between living beyond ourselves

And living for ourselves

And for families and friends

The ill and the anxious

We hear them all

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**