**New Kilpatrick**

**YouTube**

**Sunday 27th August 2023**

**Ephesians 5:21-33**

**Gathering**

How shall we live together

In unity

In harmony

As brother and sister

As husband and wife

How shall we model

The subversive way of Jesus

In our relationships

That lives for the lives of others

Making someone else’s life fuller

How shall we bless each other

In the way we live towards each other

It is where we find the gospel

And where we live anew

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for making space for us again today… that we might journey together… in hope and faith and God… which are one and the same thing… We have a passage today that has some baggage… We’re following still the women’s lectionary… and picking up some of Paul’s words and what he says about relationships… honouring one another… submitting to husbands… We’ve grown up with these passages in our background… and not often focused on them… But as always… you can’t take at face value… straight off the page… this kind of passage especially… There is a lot going on in the culture… the understanding of relationships… and what Paul is actually saying… so let’s dive in… hear what we have always heard and be ready to hear something else… Let’s worship…

**Prayer**

Caring God

Found in the spaces between us

The gap we create

The area for each of us

Holy God

We come

Welcome

In your presence

In such a presence

We wait

And hold onto hope

And seek the light

Holy light

That lights the way between us

That we might travel together

In partnership

In justice

Holy God

Hear us

Hold us

Heal us

With forgiveness

And the promise of renewal

In all our relationships

With the world

With each other

With creation

That we might seek a new way to be together

Transformative

Calling each other

Into new life

Giving of self

That another might live

Blessing our neighbour

The stranger

The companion on the way

Loving Creator

Gift of life

Light in all shadows

May we follow you

Know you

Trust you again

That we might change how we are

To each other

And to ourselves

Hear us as we say the Lord’s Prayer together

**Scripture Introduction**

When you hear this passage… a well-known one from Paul… about living as husband and wife… what questions might you want to ask? … What positive or negative feelings does it provoke? … What do you want to lay down and what do you want to honour? …

There is always a cultural question about such passages… the context in which it is being read and, given we know little about the situation Paul is writing into, … given we only have his letters and not the original letter that provoked Paul’s reply… we don’t know the context… the people… the situations… So, listen with these more open ears… with questions to ask rather than principles to hold up…

**Scripture Ephesians 5:21-33**

**21**Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**22**Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. **23**For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. **24**Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

**25**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26**in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, **27**so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. **28**In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29**For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30**because we are members of his body.[a] **31**‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ **32**This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. **33**Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

**Reflection**

I like the gospels… I’m not so keen on Paul’s letters… There I’ve said it…

I think I like the gospels more because they are open ended stories… They are situations and teaching that is broad and generous towards us… You can dive into them and see them from different angles and points of view… The epistles feel different… They are written for specific situations… and responding to events or questions about which we know little… These are all one-sided discussions… Paul is replying to what is happening in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome without us having any clear idea what he is replying to… We have no letters from the churches there to Paul… only the other way around…

So… in some sense… everything is out of context… and we try to extract general principles from some event that is quite specific and unknown to us… and it feels quite heavy on explanation… while gospel is heavy on the imagination…

That’s my excuse anyway… and the clearest example is Paul’s words about marriage and wives submitting to their husbands… Some… nae, too many… have used this as a general principle that has reduced women… given the power to men… and created a culture of very unequal relationships that is not how we imagine God wanted it to be… Even the Archers has a story line about that with George being over influenced by some misogynistic influencers that are in the headlines again this week…

It began way back in Genesis… where we’ve read that story of Adam and Eve as God creating man first and then… when man wasn’t satisfied with everything else… God creating woman from a rib of the man… The other way of hearing that story is that God created a human… took a side of that human… a personality… a set of emotions… an aspect… a side of our humanity… which is what the Hebrew suggests rather than a physical rib… which is classic King James… and created female from that side… and what was left was male…

However,… I digress… the history of male dominance is everywhere across the ancient and western world… it is woven through the Bible… and it is our cultural norm even still… What the Bible says seems to give credence to the cultural framework that has grown… there is nothing subversive in the Bible descriptions about husband and wife which you’d expect… because all the Bible does generally… is subvert the kind of relationships we have with each other… with the planet… with authority… You don’t have to look far to find that scattered throughout the gospels… It seems more difficult to find in Paul…

But… it is there… and it is there in Ephesians words about husbands and wives…

The passage we read today says… be subject t one another… there’s the general principle… and then Paul goes into the specifics… and the problems begin… According to the broader context of the letter Paul is writing… there was something going on with the men in Ephesus… They had to be told to love their wives… discipline children with gentleness… treat slaves with dignity… and you do that by following the model Jesus gave us… loving each other… That’s how you serve wives… children… slaves…

Now… pause a moment and hear these words in the ears of the people of that age… Then… as even now in some places… and up to the last 100 years in our culture… wives generally were regarded are inferior… took their husband’s religion and politics… were less intelligent… less moral… and a continual temptation for men…

Paul’s words are actually quite subversive… Instead of that way of seeing women… love them as Jesus loves everyone…

Okay... Paul does say… men are head of the household… but then he says... .and this is what it looks like to be the head… as Christ is head of the church… giving of self… serving others… washing feet… etc.… See how subversive that is…?

There is a mix of culture and theology here… but the general line is taking the culture as it is and reinterpreting the lines of power… and what these terms mean… Everything is redefined in terms of Jesus… Headship… yes… but the same way Christ is head…

The servant… the one who gave of himself completely… unconditionally… generously… so it really is quite a subversive passage after all…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

For all in relationship we pray

In relationship with each other

In relationship with creation

In relationship with community

In relationship with you

None of us are islands

And so, we pray for those connections

Networks

Support we all seek ad need through each other

For families and friends

For church and community

For environment and creation

For politics and society

For conflict and justice

For hunger and food

All these relationships

Networks

We pray

We pause

We petition

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**