**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Sunday 19th February 2023**

**Hosea 11:1-11 & Mark 5:25-34**

**Gathering**

How can I give you up?

How can I hand you over?

I haven’t got the heart to do that

It won’t let me do it

You are too precious to me

I never realised just how until now

Without you I am lost

Without you I have no purpose

And despite what you have done

Despite the way you have broken my heart

I will not turn my back on you

I will not forget you

I can’t

I am God

I am God and I can’t do that

My love for you is too strong

The astonishing poetry of love… Well, actually of Hosea, trying to express God’s… ‘godness’… to the people… We’ve just passed valentine’s day and here is the corrective to all of that… the deep down… hurting love… of a God for whom it is impossible to bear down on us with wrath… but rather… unconditional love…

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton… the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and this is our 374th anniversary of being a parish… not a building or a church or a congregation… but a parish… and it is the only anniversary we remember… because it’s the anniversary of our calling to care and be the love of God we have just heard… for our neighbours…

So on this anniversary… we have Hosea echoing in our ears… and God calling us into tomorrow… Let us worship…

**Prayer**

God of this community

Broad and wide

Beyond walls

Beyond belief

Beyond membership

We give thanks for the challenge

And the call

To be a parish community

Here

In the heart of these people

Thanks for the story we tell

In the heart of this area

Thanks for the prayers made

In the heart of people’s need

Thanks for the learning we’ve found

In the heart of our connections

Yet we confess that we have not always been the people

Our parish needs

Worried about our own future

Concerned about survival

Fearful of what we can bring to the table

It is a confusing place to be at times

And we have been generous and open

And we have been narrow and closed

We have been very human

And we wonder who we are at times

And what we can do

Yet we have risen to the occasion too

Offered ourselves

Opened ways to engage

Been hurt and hurt others

Yet rejoiced and we rejoice with others

So we give thanks

And we confess

As a parish church

That we might constantly turn outwards

Journey with others

Learn about ourselves from our neighbours

And give all we can

To all who are our parish

Trusting you

A God of love

Who will not let us go

As we learn not let others go

Because your heart

Our hearts

Will not let us do it

Hear us as we gather in the Lord’s prayer

That connects us and calls us

**Scripture Introduction**

There is passage for us today that is perhaps one of the most profound and generous passages in all the Bible… We are using the Woman’s Lectionary… so the passages are supplied for particular dates… and for the anniversary of being a parish… we have been given a gift…

This is the prophetic poetry of Hosea… a prophet who was told to marry a prostitute by God… who had children to this prostitute.. .and whose whole life and relationship was a picture of the relationship God felt God had with the people… It is not the easiest image to have… God is angry… God is upset… God is ready to let go the people who have prostituted themselves to other gods…

And Hosea… in some moment of deep inspiration… offers this poetry… almost out of nowhere…

**Reading: Hosea 11:1-11**

**Reflection**

At times like these… these uncertain times… many of us seek time to reflect… time to work out what is going on… in a confused world… that has lost what it is about… in the same way we saw Jesus do this very thing last week… as he wandered into Samaria… hoping to have some down time…

Still, we need such times to reflect… to think more deeply about who we are… that isn’t just about doing the same things all the time… especially when they no longer bring life… politically… socially… religiously… a time of introspection…

And our role model… no other than God… met in Hosea… that not particularly well-known prophet… The living symbol of Hosea and his prostitute wife… illustrates God wasn’t in a good place and neither were the people… It was all getting messy…

God… according to Hosea’s words… is sick with the Israelites… frustrated at their lack of engagement in their relationship… It seems it has all been one sided… God’s side… And in a very human moment… God offers a painfully felt litany of all the things the divine has done… to care for the Israelites…

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
    I took them up in my arms;
    but they did not know that I healed them.

This is God looking in the mirror one morning after a restless night… and coming to a decision that it just can’t go on… something has to give…

It is a major moment of divine introspection… and it is utterly unique… where we can listen in to God probe God’s own mind…

Our regular view of religion… does not have a God like this… There is no unresolved interior life with God… God has it all worked out… God knows what God is about…

But clearly not… here God is revising the divine mind… and we are spectators to God internal thought processes… You don’t get his very often…

God… it appears… is torn between emotive rage, lashing out on the one hand… and self-disciplined faithfulness… on the other…

It is the moment we should sit in silent amazement… and reflect on the God disclosed to us in this poem… This is the God who has complex emotional intelligence… who is honest with Godself… who is very much other than… all our conventional versions of God… This is God in self-critical reflection…

And it is beautiful… truly some of the most honest words ever used of God…

They shall return to the land of Egypt,
    and Assyria shall be their king,
    because they have refused to return to me.

The sword rages in their cities,
    it consumes their oracle-priests,
    and devours because of their schemes.

But then… God catches the divine self… and the whole thing changes and there is pain and tears and a good look in the mirror…

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
    How can I hand you over, O Israel?
My heart will not let me do it

My love for you is too strong

I am God and not human
    and I will not come in wrath.

Can you feel God weep?… God take the hankies out to stop the mascara running… This is deep self-reflection… This is emotion born of divine love… This is scripture… This is God… Let’s sit with this a little…

And reflect ourselves… on what is perhaps lacking in our own confused society… ? Where do we find the internal dialogue… that surely helps us live more fully and honestly… ?

Are we too busy, too tired, too focused on better scores with our economy, our politics, our neighbours, our presbytery plan… than have an internal probe of who we are and who we intend to be…

Without that… the result is absolutism… hanging on to what we imagine is definite… not allowing ourselves to veer from that… or be seen to question… or have any internal life…

A living faith… as we know… and certainly experience here, hopefully… depends upon a capacity to reflect… otherwise it is unhealthy…

But… perhaps more significantly… the absence of such self-critique makes our society unhealthy… because a free society… a democratic society… is more than a series of reactive responses… Too often our first response… is a reaction based on the first feelings we have… usually anger… before a more reflective… critical look at ourselves… and what we need the future to be… That has to be true of our leaders… and there seems to be a lack of that self-awareness… other than the one example this week of Nicola Sturgeon choosing to resign… regardless of what you think of her…

That honest self-knowing on God's part makes new futures possible for God's people… that would not be possible as long as God remained in the mode of a rant… In Hosea's poem… the future of God and God's people depends upon that self-critical awareness… When God asks "What can I do differently to be my true self?”… God makes a different future possible…

In this less well-known passage… little read and even less reflected on… lies a possible future… not just for ourselves… but for the way we do the world…

**Anniversary Reflection**

In the echo of Hosea… and a God who reaffirms it is love that drives the divine will… and shapes faith… and holds our story… as a parish church… with the emphasis on parish… there is our calling and our challenge… our model and purpose in being here…

Maybe Hosea is needed again in western society… Maybe these words are the words the words needs to hear again… that there is a love in the world… that will not destroy or come in wrath…

As we look outwards towards our parish… and recognise the place we are called to be… may we dedicate ourselves… to continue in the tradition of a God who comes in love and generosity, unconditionally… a God whose love is too strong to be overtaken in anger… a God who recognises… who comes face to face with Godself… and says… I am of love… not fear… love… not prejudice… love… not hunger… love… not loneliness…

374 years… living as being the gravity of love… for this parish community… certainly not perfectly… but as we reflect… introspect… offer some self-critique… may that gravity grow stronger… and our parish grow stronger… in God’s name…

**Prayer**

Creating God

Together

We pray

For our neighbours and friend

All who share our parish

That together

We live

Towards a place of compassion

That brings life to all in our parish

That together

We hold each other

And offer good news of love and grace and peace

And what we pray for here

We pray for our world

That how we learn to live towards each other

Is how the world learns to live

Offering itself to others in Syria and Turkey

Making peace in Ukraine and Russia

Opening its table to the horn of Africa and Yemen

Creating dialogue in Israel and Palestine

A world where relationships

Are shaped by the best of our humanity

The gift we give to others

That we would like to receive from others

A world renewed by a peace

That comes from generosity and compassion

This is our prayer

And our dedication

For how we live here

Is the hope we give the world

And for those who are our family and friends

For those who are ill both physically and mentally

Those with anxiety and stress

Those leading us who need to negotiate so much

Those cold or hungry in our own communities

And a nation that feels lost

Uncertain of the future

And the consequences of past decisions

This is our burden of prayer

Yet our mission field of hope

Locally in our parish

And between each other

Hear us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**