**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**23rd April 2023**

**Esther 2:1-18**

**Welcome and Call to Worship**

Gather, gather, one and all,

In Esther's tale we hear the call

To stand for truth, to fight for right,

To shine as stars in darkest night.

For Esther was a woman bold,

Whose heart was pure, whose story told

Of courage in the face of fear,

Of strength that overcame the tear.

She rose to power, a queen divine,

And with her beauty did outshine

The wicked Haman, who sought to kill,

But Esther's voice brought justice still.

So let us come with hearts of praise,

To worship God in all our ways,

And like Esther, may we stand strong,

And fight against all that is wrong.

For we are called to be a light,

To shine forth in the darkest night,

And in our worship, may we find

The strength to leave the world behind.

Gather, gather, one and all,

In Esther's tale we hear the call

To be the people God has called,

To rise up, stand tall, and never fall.

**Welcome**

Good morning, friends, and welcome to worship through New Kilpatrick’s YouTube channel. I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of the parish here and today, we gather together to reflect on the story of Esther and the lessons we can learn from her life. As we come before God, let us quiet our hearts and minds and prepare ourselves to worship.

Let us begin by singing our first hymn, "Be Thou My Vision." This hymn speaks of our desire to see God clearly, to follow His ways, and to trust in His provision. So, let us stand and sing with all our hearts, "Be Thou My Vision."

**Prayer**

Dear God,

As we approach Your throne of grace, we thank You for the gift of life and the opportunity to come before You. We humbly acknowledge that You are the Sovereign Ruler, who rules over all things in heaven and on earth. Just as Esther approached the ruler with reverence and humility, we come before You, seeking Your favour and mercy.

We recognise that, like Esther, we are undeserving of Your kindness and yet, You have extended Your hand of love towards us. We are grateful for Your steadfast love, which endures forever. We pray that You will grant us the same favour You granted Esther, that we may find favour in Your sight and experience Your blessings in our lives.

As we approach You today, we ask that You would help us to live our lives in a way that pleases You. May we be faithful and obedient to Your Word, and may we seek to do Your will in all that we do. Help us to trust in Your goodness and love, even when we don't understand Your ways.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, who taught the prayer that says…

Our loving Creator in heaven,

May Your name be honoured as holy.

May Your kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Provide us with our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Amen.

**Scripture Introduction**

Esther 2:1-18 is a pivotal passage in the book of Esther, which is one of the five books of the Hebrew Bible that is read during the Jewish festival of Purim. The book tells the story of how Esther, a Jewish woman, became the queen of Persia and used her position of influence to save her people from a plot to destroy them.

The events described in Esther 2:1-18 take place after Queen Vashti was deposed for disobeying King Xerxes' orders. The king ordered for young virgins to be brought to his palace from all over the kingdom, in order to choose a new queen. Esther, who was raised by her cousin Mordecai, was among these women.

The passage offers insights into the treatment of women in ancient Persia and the role of beauty in their society. It also provides a glimpse into the political intrigue that surrounded the royal court, as Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate the king and reported it to Esther, who in turn informed the king.

The story of Esther serves as a reminder of God's providence and faithfulness, even in times of great peril. It also highlights the bravery and loyalty of those who were willing to risk their lives for the sake of their people. As we reflect on Esther's story, we are reminded of the power of faith, courage, and obedience in the face of adversity.

**Scripture Reading:** Esther 2:1-18

**Reflection**

Esther 2:1-18 is a passage in the Bible that raises important questions about feminism and justice, particularly as they relate to the treatment of women in ancient Persia. The passage tells the story of how Esther, a young Jewish woman, was chosen to be the queen of Persia after Queen Vashti was deposed for disobeying King Xerxes' orders. The king ordered for young virgins to be brought to his palace from all over the kingdom, in order to choose a new queen. Esther, who was raised by her cousin Mordecai, was among these women.

The first issue that this passage raises is the objectification of women. In ancient Persia, women were viewed primarily as objects of beauty and pleasure for men. They were expected to be subservient to men and to fulfill their desires. This is reflected in the way that the king ordered for young virgins to be brought to his palace, purely for the purpose of choosing a new queen based on her physical appearance. The women were treated as objects, rather than as human beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and aspirations.

This objectification of women is a form of injustice that is still present in our society today. Women are often judged based on their physical appearance rather than their abilities, and they are expected to conform to certain societal norms and expectations. This can lead to a loss of self-worth and a sense of being devalued as a person. In the story of Esther, we see how Esther is forced to comply with the expectations of the king and his court, despite her own wishes and desires. She is treated as an object, rather than as a person with agency and autonomy.

Another issue that this passage raises is the role of women in society. In ancient Persia, women were not allowed to hold positions of power or influence. They were expected to be subservient to men and to fulfill traditional roles such as motherhood and homemaking. This is reflected in the way that Esther is treated by the king and his court. She is chosen to be queen based solely on her physical appearance, and she is expected to be obedient and subservient to the king. Despite this, Esther shows bravery and intelligence throughout the story, using her position of influence to save her people from a plot to destroy them.

The story of Esther serves as a reminder of the importance of feminism and justice in our society. It highlights the need for women to have equal rights and opportunities, and to be treated with dignity and respect. It also reminds us of the courage and strength that women possess, even in the face of adversity and oppression.

As we reflect on the story of Esther, we are called to advocate for justice and equality for all women. We are called to challenge the societal norms and expectations that can lead to the objectification and marginalization of women. We are called to stand up for those who are oppressed and to use our own positions of influence to make a positive difference in the world.

In conclusion, Esther 2:1-18 raises important questions about feminism and justice, particularly as they relate to the treatment of women in ancient Persia. The story highlights the objectification and marginalization of women, as well as the importance of women's rights and opportunities. As we reflect on this passage, we are reminded of the need to advocate for justice and equality for all women, and to use our own positions of influence to make a positive difference in the world.

**News**

**Prayer of Intercession**

Loving God,

We come before you today with hearts full of gratitude for your constant love and presence in our lives. As we reflect on the story of Esther and the issues of feminism and justice that it raises, we pray for all those who are marginalized and oppressed in our world.

We pray for women who are objectified and devalued, for those who are forced to conform to societal norms and expectations that do not allow them to fulfill their potential. We ask that you would give them the courage to stand up against injustice and to advocate for their rights and dignity.

We pray for all those who hold positions of influence and power, that they would use their positions for the good of all people, regardless of their gender or background. We ask that they would work towards a society where everyone is valued and respected, and where women are not objectified or marginalized.

We pray for those who are working towards justice and equality for women, that they would be encouraged and strengthened in their efforts. We ask that you would give them wisdom and perseverance as they seek to make a positive difference in the world.

We pray for those who are oppressed and marginalized because of their gender, that they would know your love and care for them. We ask that you would give them hope and strength to persevere in the face of adversity.

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we would be mindful of the ways in which we can make a positive difference in the world. We ask that you would guide us in our actions and decisions, and that we would be committed to working towards justice and equality for all people.

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, who showed us the way of love and justice. Amen.

**Epilogue**

I’m not sure what you have thought of today’s service… but everything was written by AI… the hymns chosen, were chosen by Chat GPT… the reasons for choosing these hymns was given by ChatGPT… the reflections, prayers and order were all AI generated… did you notice… am I actually needed…

Now you know that… how does that make us feel about the service today?… While, perhaps most will have noticed a different style… perhaps even a little old fashioned in language… would anyone have thought it was completely artificially generated… No human input at all other than asking the AI programme to write a prayer based on Esther 2… or asking it… what hymn would work following that reflection you have just written…

Chat GPT… which is the open AI programme on the net that all have access to… is easy to use and it generates original content… What you heard today was completely created by a computer programme that scans a massive data base… i.e., the internet… and looks for patterns in language… and learns to generate something completely unique from that information… It is not taking something it has found and just offering it up… it is creating it itself…

I can ask it to write a prayer based on Esther 2 in the style of Billy Connolly… if I wanted… and I did… and it did too… (wait behind if you wish to hear it)…

What happens to our beliefs when humans create ultimately, perhaps, something that is sentient, that can think on its own?… What is unique and important about human content… sharing real experiences… what about our soul… Are our less than perfect versions of things actually better than the very best a computer can do?… for example… we are dying as a church in the form we are at the moment… An AI programme for church could take in a whole lot of variables data such as the most popular hymns, and design a sermon based on the demographics and recent events that have happened locally or internationally in the best style to engage the population you wish to engage… with language and illustrations most popular with those folk in your local area… along with suggested images and technology that would best fit that generation and culture… and then tell you how to connect with them… Is that the way to do mission now? …

Human traits will become more valuable… because AI will be biased as we are… they cannot create an unbiased computer programme… Google wasn’t able to remove mysoginistic programming from its online interviews because it was created by men… It was impossible…

What do we lose… what do we gain… what is religion and faith in that scenario… and what do we believe in… are we just feeding folk what they want… but is that not what we have always done anyway… and how will all of that change how we understand God… and that relationship we have…

You can see I have only questions… it is an interesting place to be when there are only questions in our faith… Let’s ask those questions… maybe out of fear as much as intrigue… but also dare to explore them… and grow a faith round this new-ish technology as we have done with printing presses… currency… maps… all of which changed us and our view of God…

**Benediction (Roddy)**

May the God of justice and mercy go before you, guiding your steps and granting you courage to stand up against injustice. May the story of Esther inspire you to advocate for the rights and dignity of all people, especially those who are marginalised and oppressed. May the love of Christ fill your heart, and may you go forth from this place with a renewed commitment to work towards a society where everyone is valued and respected. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.