**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**12th March 2023**

**Judges 16:6-21**

**Gathering**

Among all the confusion of the world

And the uncertainty it creates

May we gather in hope

Seeking a light to guide us

Among all the stories of our faith

These twisted tales of messy lives

Of heroes and anti-heroes

May we gather seeking truth

Among all the promises of the gospel

For the messy people of this world

May we gather in the story of God

And worship the one who sets us free

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and once more thank you for the time you make to allow us to worship together here online… It is indeed a messy world… but thus, it has always been… There is hardly a story in our faith that doesn’t parallel the confusion we feel today… in a world that feels ever narrower and fearful of migrants and refugees and foreigners… Into such a world… steps an ancient tale… of a heroic strongman and his foreign femme fatale…

Yet in even speaking like that… and describing characters in such a way… we know there is something deeply wrong with this story… even mentioning their names… takes us to a place where we’ve already typecast them… Clearly there is another story in the story of Samson and Delilah…

**Prayer**

Loving God

Breadth of love

And generosity of grace

Here we gather

In the mystery and wonder of faith

Always searching for you in our world

Seeking the words that speak of love

Sharing the acts that are offer peace

Finding the space that includes us all

May this be such a place

Not a building

But a community

Where our doors are broad

And our faith open

And make here an honest space

A forgiving space

A renewing space

That we can come now

As we are

With all the baggage the word has heaped on us

And all the prejudice we have grown

And all the fears we have invested in

And lay them here

Slowly

Cautiously

Wondering if it is true

That you would rather we let it go

That we can be renewed

And live fully again

And when we aren’t ready to let go yet

When it is too difficult right now

When we haven’t worked through the pain yet

May you wait for us

Accompany us

Through the grief and the hurt

And trust your promise

That is as wide as all creation

That we have a place

Whoever we are

In your place

Your house

Your home

Loved and redeemed again

**The Story So Far**

Samson… a Nazarite from birth… dedicated to God by his mother who was too old to give birth… the obvious sign of a Nazarite was that they never cut their hair… but also abstained from wine, dead bodies… and took a vow of holiness… none of which Samson fitted well…

He had a certain weakness for Philistine women… and fell in love with a number of them… his parents warning him off… but he made his own decisions…

On his way to his wedding… he killed a lion with his bare hands… On his way home he passed the lion and there were bees making honey… which ruined the vow about not touching dead bodies…

He created a riddle from this event… and used it on some Philistines at his wedding… who were causing trouble… answer within a week… he’d provide clothing for the 30 of them… or they would do the same for him…

They couldn’t answer it, so they threatened the lives of Samson’s wife and family… His wife pleaded with him for the answer…which he eventually gave her… and she gave to the men… who then gave the answer to Samson…

He was livid and went off and killed 30 men from Ashkelon… and gave the clothing to the Philistines… Samson’s wife’s father didn’t let Samson see her again… but offered her sister instead… But Samson was not happy and as punishment he tied 300 foxes together by their tails… lit a torch between them and sent them through the corn fields… at harvest time…

There was a battle… and Samson slew unknown numbers singlehandedly… (hope you are enjoying this sacred story)… The Israelites didn’t want war so bound Samson and gave him to the Philistines, but he broke the cords in the Philistine camp and killed 1000 Philistines with a donkey’s jawbone…

He then became a judge of Israel for 20 years… After other similar events… he met Delilah… a Philistine… and she was promised 1100 pieces of silver from the five leaders if she would tell them the secret of Samson’s strength…

**Scripture Judges 16:6-21**

**Delilah’s Tale**

I wasn’t the first

But I was the last

Samson always had a weakness for Philistine women

Ironic, him being a foreign Israelite

And a Nazirite too, dedicated to God

But he had no regard for anything that didn’t suit him

He broke every rule there was

To furnish his own desires

And he had many of them

He drank

When he had vowed not to

Lied constantly

Found women

And abused them

A selfish brute

And brute he was

Flying into a rage at the simplest thing

A spoiled child

Who lashed out

With jawbones

And fire

And his bare hands

When he didn’t get his way

And they thought I was a match for him

That I could persuade him to give up his secret

They forced me

Paying me off

Threatening all sorts

Only because they were so easily taken in by the myth of a woman themselves

Just like him

But he trapped me too

To my own people I was a weapon

And to him I was easy satisfaction with nowhere to go

I had little choice

And both sides painted me a prostitute

A seductress

A conniving woman

Hardly!

I have been abused by the story tellers

And how they have painted me for their own gain;

The narrow-minded conservatives

Who can only see a sinner in me;

And a religion that feared the stranger

Using me as an example of what goes wrong when you take a foreign woman

Maybe I am all these things

But that’s the easy explanation.

Where is the challenge in that!

But maybe I am more complicated

And, in my story, the way you speak of me

Says more about you than me

I am Delilah

And I am the lens through which

You can see yourself.

**Reflection**

The last time I was in a full cinema was to see Grease with John Travolta and Olivia Newton John… I went with a friend, and it was so full… we both had to sit on our own in different parts of the Greenock Odeon… as there were only half a dozen single seats left…

Gone are the days of whole communities sharing the same experience together… Last time I was at the cinema… I went with my daughter to see James Bond… there were only half a dozen folk in the cinema at all…

But when Samson and Delilah hit the cinemas in 1950 it was packed… It was the highest grossing film of 1950 and at its release it was the third highest grossing film ever… and you get a free coffee following worship if you can name the two films that grossed higher… (Gone with the Wind and Best Years of our Lives)…

Clearly all that was way before my time… but… dare I suggest… there may be a few here who saw Victor Mature and Hedy Lamar… retell this ancient story… Victor all masculine and innocent… and Hedy… all pouting and seductive… manipulating the poor emotionally weak male of the species…

So, is that the biblical story?… does Samson comes over as a bit… naive… innocently succumbing to a ‘woman’s charm’… and Delilah… the misogynists’ classic wily woman… manipulating everyone by prostituting herself?…

That’s the easy version that reflects no insight… falling into the very trap the bible story sets for us… and was the purpose of the original story… liking the antihero, despite his many failures… and loathing what that foreign woman does to him…

But let’s be honest… Samson is a fool… a selfish… arrogant… brute of a character… with no concern for anyone except himself… He’s manipulative when it suits him… and quick to drop anyone who prevents him getting his own way… Life is all about him…

Delilah on the other hand… is trapped… She is not free to make any of her own decisions… On the one side… she has her own people… the Philistines… putting her under pressure to trap Samson… and on the other… Samson himself… a violent man… who constantly lies to her… and has gone through four other women already… but who has given her a home… She is loathed by the Israelites… and despised by her own people… She doesn’t have a lot of choice…

It’s a terrible story… of abuse and misogamy and violence… through which Delilah has been demeaned and cheapened and called all sorts… which was the whole original point… It’s there in the bible as a cautionary tale, warning the Israelites not to marry foreign women… Keep the clan pure… This is a story told through the fear of assimilation… Look what happened to Samson… it says… That foreign woman was his downfall…

The other way to hear this story is to see it for what it is… where religion is abused and its power used to preserve a way of life… where God was a version of the author’s biases… abusing those with least power and opportunity… in order to force a version of religion that was narrow… and nationalistic… and post Brexit… perhaps we are challenged by how migrants and refugees… have been used in such a way…

But there is more… for the story is also, surely… a warning about character and the dangers of power… Samson is but a shadow of a man of God… he has no discipline, he is selfish, and total disregard for doing right… and yet he is a judge, because power seems to win over character… Don’t blame the women… Samson is simply a bad hero… caught up in the arrogance that comes with power and might… He is not an attractive character… and indeed is quite dangerous… It is an abuse of power… for his own gain… and have we not had enough of these characters in the real world… those who run the world on their own terms… and for their own gain… in politics… and industry… Samson is all of them…

This is not such an ancient story… but surely an up to date… a cautionary tale for us all… as we reflect on how easily we allow ourselves to abuse those with least power… migrants… refugees… Delilah is their hero… but also she is the hero for those who are tired of the way the world runs on the personal whims of a few… where power wins over character… in conflict… parliament… and all those who get hurt in the fallout…

Samson is not the hero… but Delilah doesn’t win either… It is not a tale of winners and losers… but one that cautions us… and hopes we will not make the same mistakes… again…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Loving God

Here we bring the world

And pray for that world

For the pressures we all feel

From conflict and what comes of that

To those who are in the midst of it

Experiences we can hardly understand

And most of us do not want it

And can live in peace

Yet a few keep it going

What do we do?

And for hunger

And a world that keeps us rich

And so many poor

Because of trade

And prophets

And pensions

And markets

And we’d rather have a balanced world

And we can’t get there

And what do we pray?

For a world

Where all the anchors

We thought secure and solid

Now shifting

The fear of costs

Of health

Of welfare

That which we value more now

When we should have sooner

What is it we ask for?

When the story we tell of ourselves today

Is different from the myth we once believed

Of church

Of nation

Of values

Hear us O God

As we travel through the uncertainties

And may we gather here

All those we love

Families and friends

Those we know who are sick and ill

Mentally and physically

Those facing crisis

From cost of living to having nothing

From health to education

From conflict to earthquake

Loving God

We rely on your love

Your justice

Your hope

And we pray in that love

For the world

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**