**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Acts 5**

**6th June 2021**

A day in the life…

**Welcome**

Hello!… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister in New Kilpatrick Parish Church… and again… thank you for the invitation to join you today whenever you are…

Being church feels strange at the moment… We’re between things and have been for a long time now… but as we continue to safely move our way through levels… and more people vaccinated… and some routines are beginning again… and new routines taking place of old ones… life still feels a… rudderless… I think I have found this latter part of this lockdown far worse than any other part of the last 15 months… I just can’t settle… I think I’m more anxious now than I ever was… and have to admit, nervous taking the service in the sanctuary… It used to be my home… I can’t put my finger on it but I think it is just tiring… anticipating the future… waiting… worrying… coping with the consequences of the latest change in levels… losing anchors in your life… I’m hoping others feel the same and it isn’t just me… or I need to go for a long lie down…

We’re exploring the early church through this season… and I can’t help think that restlessness… that anxiety… that uncertainty was part of their routine… They didn’t have an institution to look after… worse, their lives were in danger… not just from authorities… so today we take a wee lens on one day in the life of the church… offering less comment, and more story-telling…

Let’s gather, in prayer

**Prayer**

Spirit of Christ

Guiding truth

Pause between our words

We make space here

To be

To breathe

To be held

In holy Space

Out of time with everything else

Unaffected by the world

A safe space

Sanctuary

Yet,

A space *in* time and in the world

Affected by the hurt and healings of life

A space that holds all we are

As we really are

Holy God

Holy Redeemer

Holy Spirit

(Pause)

May the silence be enough

Unshaped by our words

Unlimited by our definitions

Unrestrained by our beliefs

(Pause)

That we might learn a new language

That does not need words

But of the heart

The soul

The emotion

Of trusting beyond ourselves

That cannot be expressed

Simply known

May we know it

Together

In community

Hear us as we say the global prayer

Our Father, who is in heaven,

Hallowed by your name;

Your kingdom come;

Your will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever.

Amen

**Story 1 The tragedy of Ananias (WD Cocker)**

Here’s a retelling of the story of Sapphira and Ananias who sold property and said they would give it all to the church but didn’t, holding back some for themselves, with dreadful consequences for them. It’s a fabulous poem by Scottish poet CD Cocker but it is more than just a story about these two characters, it is a comment on the church too.

Some sinners in the bible story

Get muckle praise, an gang to glory,

While ithers, for some wee bit fau’t,

Are turned like stookies into sau’t.

I’m wae for yon chiel Ananias,

Wha gat his paiks fur bein’ pious.

There’s mony a saint wi’ truth made freer,

Yet wasne brandit as a leear.

Inspired by zeal an’ true devotion,

Puir Ananias took the notion

To sell his croft, an’ ilka stirk,

An’ gie the siller to the Kirk.

“It’s mair than we can weel afford,

But, faith!” says he, “we’ll please the Lord.

An’ as the kirk o’ funds is short,

They micht mak’ me a deacon for’t.”

The gude-wife lat him say his say:

A wilfu’ man maun hae his way.

As for hersel’, she wasna fidgin’

To sell her sark for her religion.

But when the roup was ower, ’tis true,

Her canny husband took the rue.

On Sawbath morn, wi’ waefu’ e’e,

He said, “Gosh! That’s a lot to gie,

The hale jing-bang! I’m in a swither —

We’re gyte to give them’t a’ thegither!

We’ll keep a wee thing to oorsels.

Come on, Sapphira, there’s the bells!”

Sae, aff to kirk they took the gate,

Whaur Peter, staun’in’ at the plate,

Castin’ a glower in their direction,

Jaloused they’d brocht a guid collection.

“The Sustentation Fund,” thinks Pate,

“Need a bit heeze at ony rate.”

But syne the saint’s neb sniffed the win’;

He smelt the foosty smell o’ sin.

As Ananias, faur frae blate,

Plunked doon his offerin’ in the plate,

The auld apostle speired, fu’ wae,

“Is that the best that ye can dae?”

Dumfounert, Ananias stood,

Dashed by the saint’s ingratitude,

Then answered, heedless o’ decorum,

“That’s a’ ye’ll get, auld cockalorum!

It’s ilka boddle I can gie.”

Saint Peter answered, “That’s a lee!”

The Lord have mercy on yer heid!” —

An’ doon drapt Ananias deid.

The young men dragged him oot the gate,

Saint Peter still stood at the plate.

Doon in the darkness o’ a dunny

They ryped the corp’s pooch for his money.

O, Peter man, it once befell

Ye tell’t a gey big whid yersel’,

That garred the very cocks to craw.

Had ye nae mind o’ this ava?

The tragedy was no’ complete;

In cam’ Sapphira trig an’ neat.

Smilin’ she gaed to grace her pew,

Nor kent she was a weedow noo.

Saint Peter’s question garred her loup —

“Did ye mak’ muckle oot the roup?”

O she was young an’ she was bonnie!

Yet tell’t a lee as guid as ony.

To free himsel’ frae ony bias,

Pate sent her efter Ananias.

**Wee reflection piece: questions**

These are big demands…

How might we support each other in sharing a faith in relationship with each other?

**Story 2**

**12**Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. **13**None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. **14**Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, **15**so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. **16**A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

**17**Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, **18**arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. **19**But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, **20**“Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.” **21**When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching.

**Wee reflection piece: wee questions**

They took quite a risk,

But risk is sometimes better known as faith

**Story 3**

And so the authorities became more and more nervous. “Did we not give you strict orders NOT to teach in his name? Yet, here you are, filling Jerusalem with your teaching, making sure you bring this mans blood on us”. The high priest was angry and worried. It was an easy possibility that the empire would come down hard on them all because of this small group of apostles.

“But we must obey God rather than human authority,” said Peter. “The God we follow is the one who raised up Jesus from the death you put him to. We are witnesses and so is the Holy Spirit.”

The authorities were enraged and wanted to kill Peter and all of them there and then. But a well respected leader on all sides, Gamaliel reasoned with the council leaders. “Consider carefully what you propose to do here. In the past, people have said what Peter has said. But ended up being nine day wonders. They soon perished. So if this is of human origin, then it will fail. But if it is from God, then none of us can do a thing about it, and we don’t want to end up fighting God.”

And so they flogged the disciples and let them go and still they were to be found each day in the Temple teaching and proclaiming Jesus, Messiah.

**Wee reflection piece: wee questions**

What is of God will succeed

And there is nothing to can do to stand against it

In our growing future, how can we tell what is of God

Or might we patiently build our future on that which we trust when we cannot see?

**Reflection**

It feels more now, as if the church is facing exactly 180 degrees from the direction it faced in the early years. When you read these stories, it does feel a whole lot more dangerous, living on the edge, daring authorities with their enthusiasm for witnessing to the story, person and belief they had in Jesus.

Indeed, clearly, as we know not just from the bible, it was a dangerous thing to speak of Jesus not just because it stood against other worldviews, and authorities, but because, if you spoke out, then the whole community could be put in peril: “Are you determined to bring this man’s blood on us,” ask the authorities?

Yet they carry on. It’s an interesting moment when the early church has to weigh up the risk of what they do. How much risk is acceptable, and the preachers and proclaimers discover they have quite a high threshold for risk and as soon as they are flogged and freed, they are in the temple again.

It feel all the more brave, or foolish given how risk averse we are. Clearly, given my words at the beginning today, I’m not a great risk taker. Quite the opposite.

But maybe as a church we have a thing or two to learn about our original legacy of risk taking, in placing big ideas, and courageous dreams into the world, especially “when it feels our world is choked by a dwindling capacity for imagination” as the Rev John Allen suggests.

And the church is in the midst of that too as it pulls together new plans, closing buildings, reducing ministry numbers, gathering up what it can in order to survive the future, and we are in that dangerous place where our vision begins to narrow and we will all begin to compete to survive as congregations, claiming things in our past justify our existence now, rather than gather up all our pasts together as congregations, and shape a future, together.

The early church shows us people who trust resurrection, have a high threshold for risk, willing to stand on principle when the authorities live in fear of that.

But that is broader than just ourselves. This is certainly no claim to fame but a number of years ago, five of us at the general assembly decided to make a wee harmonious protest when the church was talking about its investments. Just before the report about how many of its shares were invested in oil companies, we stood up from around the hall and sang a rewritten verse of ‘All things b right and beautiful’.

It did take the wind from the moderator and some weren’t too pleased. I heard this year the church divested itself of all its shares in oil. Obviously our wee protest didn’t cause that directly, there was already an undercurrent, but it is an example of taking a risk on our principles.

Now, perhaps that might look like the church focussing on and exposing the tax of big corporations that pay hardly any, and certainly not in the places their profits are made, and do that despite the publicity and press from those corporations, or it might look like us supporting equal marriage even if we fear retribution from other congregations or denominations. It might be encouraging, reclaim these streets, calling out misogyny rather than asking women to adopt different behaviour to keep themselves safe, despite the fear of protestations about culture and victim blaming. There are a host more examples

The lesson is, love accompanies all those courageous enough to risk the truth, to re-imagine, to find themselves as risk-takers again, truth-tellers again, kingdom-shakers again, trusting resurrection again, and discovering love knows a high threshold for risk.

**Prayers**

Dear Lord and leader into the unknown,

We think of the bravery and conviction of people like Peter and Silas. May we, in our turn, be prepared to speak out about what we believe in – fairness in an unfair world, truth in a world that can be very dishonest, and equality that has lately slipped further from our grasp.

We think of the actions of the early church, moving with faith into a new world and wonder what our new world will be. May those with imagination and forward- thinking realise what the values of tradition and history give to us and may those who have helped to make that history give wings to the new ideas.

May we also allow ourselves the freedom to move forward in our daily lives. Help us to realise that for some a small step taken out of lockdown is a giant leap. May we support one another in our present risk-taking and may we find the right balance between taking and not taking risks. Be with those who have been forced to take huge risks in uprooting themselves and fleeing to a strange country and guide governments to take the risks to support them.

Be with people who need huge courage to move forward – those for whom life has altered completely, those who have lost someone very dear to them, those who have lost a job and those who have lost their confidence, or their way. Help us all to find the courage to give, and accept, that hug where needed.

May the road rise to meet us – and may God hold us in the palm of his hand.

Amen.

**Benediction**

Go into the world

And be the risk of resurrection

And the grace…

**Doxology**

**News**

Thanks for the invitation to join you today. Please feel free to join us at ant time online at nkchurch.org.uk. We have the quiz this week at 7pm on Tuesday, Wednesday there is a session at 7.30, Thursday Sofa Surfers is a community night at 7pm.

The bulletin has just been published and you can download from the website each week on a Friday. Thanks to Norna and Lillian for reading and Kirsteen for praying.

Hope to see you again soon. Take care and keep safe.