**New Kilpatrick**

**Sermon**

**Matthew 5:21-37**

**9th February 2020**

***Spirit… speak into out hearts… dance with our souls… challenge our spirits… and wrestle with us for the truth… May we be active in finding the faith that speaks good news and honesty into all our living… So be it… Amen***

Normally I would start a sermon… mentioning something happening in the world we are all familiar with… something in the news… or something that was happening to ourselves… something we can all relate to… The point is to take a situation everyone recognises or has some experience of… and reflect on what the gospel says…

But I couldn’t think of one situation this week… not in the sense that there was nothing that seemed relevant… but because there were so many… there wasn’t just one… but a plethora… We could have begun with Mr Trump’s impeachment trial… or Mr Johnston’s COP26 environmental crisis… or Oscars or BAFTA awards that seem to have ignored so many minority groups… the death of the doctor who first told us about Corona virus… or even last Tuesday’s presbytery… but that would have been a step too far… but all of them… illustrate just how out of sorts we are with each other…

We have just polarised ourselves… we are out of relationship with each other… and the more we are out of relationship… the more we imagine we are better off in our silos… where we grow less… and enjoy life less…

O, I’m in a happy mood today…

So in hope and optimism… let’s turn to the gospel… and read today’s to lift this pervasive, national mood… and we find ourselves in the middle of Jesus harsher words… about oaths… adultery… and divorce…

Even the Almighty seems wont to bring us down… even as we are down already… offering us impossible ethical standards… we cannot possibly hope to keep…

And then you wonder… just perhaps… maybe… possibly… that’s the whole point… Actually we can’t keep them…

These aren’t rules so much to take literally… Rather they are hyperbole to illustrate something we keep missing… that our relationships… with the world… and with our neighbour… are not based on rules… but in being *more* and *better*… than those rules…

We have argued long… in the sacred and secular courts of our land… about the rules governing our personal and national relationships… At the moment we are entering that negotiated legal relationship with other nations called trade rules… Already we are all playing Russian Roulette with Chinese company Huawei… or Australian rules… or Canada plus, plus, plus… or Norwegian model… I can’t keep up…

But have you ever thought… the sermon on the mount… offers a completely different model… from a rules based one…

On the face of it… Jesus says… You have heard is said… and then he offers traditional rules about our personal relationships… But I say to you… and he goes on to offer something even more strict… impossibly strict… anger is as bad a murder… looking at someone is as bad as adultery…

And taking that literally… means we are impossibly caught in our own humanness… It is never going to be good enough… There is a feeling we are even trapped in the grace of God… Only God can get us out of this… God alone forgives… has that power over us… Some have even said we are simply pawns in game God plays with us…

Or…

We can be honest… and recognise… that’s not the kind of relationship we experience with love… Love is not there to traps us… or control us… God is not someone who makes the rules so difficult to live that we are constantly tripped up by them… and always in love’s debt…

What if… Jesus… in these relationship rules… is exaggerating the situation to prove a point… which is a method he uses with all his stories…

The problem with a legalistic understanding of the sermon is that you have a heavenly checklist… No murder today… check… No adultery… check… and you go through each day… tallying up how well you have kept the rules…

But there is no life in that… It’s like every day is an exam… That is not the kingdom way…

Perhaps what Jesus is saying here… is quite simple… I want you to do more than just live life as a check list… No murder is good… but I want more from you than not killing each other… I want you to love each other…

No adultery… great… that’s never a bad thing… but I want more from you than just the things you haven’t done… What about thinking about how you live towards each other… what about doing more than just the minimum… what about generously… respect… honouring each other for who that person is…

That’s what this is saying surely…

The point is that Jesus is asking us to look beyond the law… See it’s goal… see the end point… which is the life and the wellbeing of our neighbour… The rules are where we being… but be more… It’s like an impeachment process… legally you may have cleared the bar… but you need to be more…

The sermon on the mount… holds out the welfare and wellbeing of our neighbours… as the standard to aim for… and trusting our neighbours do the same towards us… not just successfully keeping a list of rules…

And there is your healthy relationship… living towards another… trusting they are living towards us in the same way… and even if they don’t… we still can towards them… That’s the ethic of the sermon on the mount… the kingdom way…

How often have we said that it is always about relationships… the kingdom… the gospel… the church… the community… the congregation… our families… even public heath… politics… impeachment… it is all about the relationship… and at the moment… we don’t do them well…

We have populist governments in the west that have come to power on the back of making us skeptical of another… of saying we are going to be great again… a new era of standing tall in the world… harking back to empire and power… standing as proud individuals in the world…

And Jesus must just weep at such foolishness… because nothing is great… if the relationships we have with others… are broken… or based on power… arrogance… empire… or simply the bare minimum we can be to each other…

The sermon on the mount… older than more trade agreements… encourages us… go and be more… go and be better than that…

Don’t just use the rules to stay out of trouble… Go and be something worthwhile towards your neighbour…

And when our rules and laws invite us to do that… then we will be in right relationship… and we will be able to measure ourselves as a community and as a nation… that seeks the welfare of another… and finds our value… and worth… and future… in being more… to the least… the last… the neighbour and the stranger… more than a list of bare minimum responsibilities… but a generous celebration of being more… of being better… growing closer to the kingdom…