**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**Matthew 21:23-32**

**27th September 2020**

**Welcome**

Hello… good to be with you once more. From wherever you are gathering, we trust together we can make this a sacred space… where we can join our stories… to the bigger story of God… and as these tangle together… we find community… and a truth that we are all somewhere along this road of faith… some further than others… some going off at tangents… some slowly moving… others pondering and turning round… but no one is better at faith than anyone else…

Thank you for being honest enough to realise we are all at different places along this line. It illustrates and is a celebration of the diversity in which we have been created… and the cause for the richness of community, as well as the invitation to listen to each other… attempt to understand one another… as we find ourselves at different places along this line…

That’s a symbol we’ll use throughout worship… so where do you find yourself? Close to… further away… from church… God… each other… Have you moved since lockdown began…? We explore that today…

**Gathering**

We walk the line

Between certainty and questions

With a faith

That struggles between the two

An honest faith

Ever alive

To a world

That finds itself

Constantly shifting

But in that space

On the line between

We meet the one

Who hold of both ends

And curves it round

In a love

That holds it all

**Prayer**

Creator

The anchor we need

And the question we ask

Somewhere between these

We meet

The solid ground

And the shifting horizon

Between the two

We meet you

Ever present

The constant

The foundation

The companion

Yet the itinerant

The storyteller

The adventure

Loving God

In times as these

When the familiar words don’t always feel familiar

And the truths don’t always feel so certain

And we shift from where we once were

May we listen

To the beat of love

The flow of grace

The stirring of hope

Undefined by words

That now set free

From where we were

To where we are going

May we hear their invitation

In which to live and love

Rejoice and seek shelter

A presence we do not need to explain

But a companionship we simply share

And we share it here

Together

Now

Hold us ever

In such a place

A safe place

on unfamiliar ground

Hear us as we pray

Our Father, who is in heaven

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day 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, and the power,

and the glory for ever.

**Scripture Introduction**

Can I let you into a secret… I get my head around one set of Covid restrictions… how many we are allowed to meet with and where… and what you are allowed to do… when I go into the dumps a bit… because here’s another set I have to work out how to live with them…

It’s not a hardship… I completely support them… and it frustrates me when others try and be cute with them… but that’s because I’m a fearty… but the whole thing just gets you down sometimes… and I want to say… that’s okay… and perhaps even healthy… because it would be an untypical personality who was thoroughly enjoying all of this…

However… we’re faithful people… We have something about us that catches hold of the idea we are living into the future… living under a promise…

The story of Abraham is case in point… told he’d have children when he was 75… and having to wait 25 years before it came true… What must it be like to live under a promise like that… everyday waking up wondering… “is this going to be the day”….

That’s the kind of hope we live in… it doesn’t stop you getting down… because it isn’t a hope that’s about an end result… but a way of living… so today… let’s remind ourselves of that hope we live by… that longterm-ism… called the promises of God…

Here’s a story that doesn’t sound it is about hope… but on second reading… might be exactly the hope we need…

**Reading: Matthew 21:23-32 (read by Elizabeth Forbes)**

He entered the temple and as he was teach ing the Chief Priests and elders of the nation came up to him and asked, “By what authority are you acting like this? Who gave you this authority?”

Jesus replied, “I also have a question for you. If you answer it I will tell you by what authority I act. The baptism of John, was it from God or from men?”

This set them arguing among themselves. If we say ‘from God’, he will say, ‘then why did you not believe him?’ But if we say ‘from men’ we are afraid of the people’s reaction for they all take John for a prophet. And so they answered, “We do not know.”

And Jesus, “Then I will not tell you either by what authority I act, but what do you think about this? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘My son, Go and work today in the vineyard’.

‘I will, sir!’ The boy replied, but he did not go.

The father came to the second and said the same. ‘I will not!’ he replied, but afterwards he changed his mind and went.

Which of the two did what his father wanted?

‘The second,’ they replied. Then Jesus said, “Then truly I tell you tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you for when John came to show you the right way to live you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw that you did not change your minds and believe him.

**Reflection**

Okay… a wee parable of hope… here is a positive word… to all who refuse to listen to love… grace… justice… God… It’s never too late to change your mind… Time is not of the essence in the kingdom… it is never too late to trust love… believe into grace… touch God…

This parable contrasts… all who say the right things… believe the right things… look like the right people… but don’t follow through… with those who are rejected… put out as drop-outs… who don’t make the grade… yet come to discover the promise of life… the freedom love brings…

Tax-collectors… prostitutes… represent those groups of folk society wrote off in Jesus day… and there are plenty we can replace them today… and on the other hand the chief priests are those whose lives made the grade…

But beneath that false division religion and society have often created… believing one is acceptable and another isn’t… one deserves help and another doesn’t… there is a singular truth… beyond the differences… none of us are out of reach of God…

In fact those we imagine furthest away from the tradition… end up “getting God” better than those who seem closer… because a wee insight each generation discovers… God is found in unpredictable places beyond the church… while those who serve the traditions well… limit their encounter… imagining they have to protect God… from the changes… and limit their enjoyment and fullness of life…

Jesus places the priests and elders who engage with rhetoric and obedience yet ultimately fail to do God’s will… in contrast to the prostitute and tax collectors… who disqualify themselves but then turn to God…

It’s as if the SYSTEM is more important… the rituals… the traditions in order to protect God… The Chief Priests have become institutionalised… and don’t know the freedom beyond… the promise they have been given to live within…

So where are we on that spectrum between the tax collectors and prostitutes… and the chief priests and elders… protecting God… who doesn’t need protecting…

Clearly we are somewhere between the two extremes… but it seems from this parable… perhaps the more we feel able to let go those things we protect… especially God… we let the faith live anew… Perhaps that’s where the life will be for us now…

I don’t know… but I do know… that is hard to hear… especially when you are wearing a dog collar and you’re wrapped up in the institution so much… It is such a small parable… but it has huge… ground shifting consequences…

Maybe the place to start is to trust the promise we live in… Let’s use all that energy the world devotes to a populism that decides who’s in or out and divides us… and there are versions of the faith that do that too… and focus it instead… towards enjoying the freedom of indiscriminate… boundless mercy… that is never too late to find new life… in a hope that leads us… and calls us to that promised future… renewed and reshaped…

**Somewhere between**

This parable… told in this moment of covid-19… offers some questions… especially when the experience of our typical church-lives have been completely disrupted… and we’ve found ourselves moving along that line between holding onto all the ritual, protecting the tradition, the chief priests… and those who find God less formally, the tax collectors…

These last six months needs to change us and how we interpret and experience the faith… so here are some questions that have arisen in conversation over the last few months that many of us have had… They are not offered seeking answers… we’ve faithful enough to know there are no answers… They aren’t meant to be loaded, nor even mutually exclusive… there’s some of us invested in both ends of the line… It’s all about reflecting on how this experience has transformed… and where our intuition and faith is moving…

**The Line Between**

Imagine a line between one end and the other: where are you on the line between encouraging worship in the sanctuary and worship online?

Where are you on the line between seeing church as a community of activities and being agents of transformation?

Where are you on the line between a membership model of church and where all-comers are are welcome?

Where are you on the line between keeping the traditions going and being fluid with them?

Where are you on the line between reaffirming familiar words and reframing familiar stories?

Where are you on the line between seeing church as a place and seeing church as a movement?

**Prayer**

Loving God

In all the questions we have

And the ways of being, we are exploring

And the times that bring us down

And those that lift us up

Hold us all

We walk between so many extremes

Finding a way through

And we will

And we shall

Find new life

And new ways of being

But here may we reshape how we travel through

Trusting who we will be at the other end

And so we pick up

And hold here

And journey with

All those who are hurt and bruised

From the pandemic

Those struggling

Those wondering

Those anxious

These are our companions

Around whom we shape our world

We travel with

Those whose health is low

Physically and mentally

And those who worry for them

Those who grieve

And feel lost

Those who need structure

And cannot find it

These are our companions

Around whom we shape our world

We travel with

Those whose livelihoods are less certain

Where business are struggling

And redundancy and unemployment is very real

These are our companions

Around whom we shape our world

We travel with those who seek to encourage

Who research and give of self

Who volunteer and care and support

These are our companions

Around whom we shape our world

In all our prayers

And longings

And vision

As we travel the line between

We seek love’s strength

And love’s comfort

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**

Go in peace

Go into the new

Go toward that into which the faith is calling us

And the grace…

**Announcements**

Thanks for travelling with us today… and, of course, we travel every day on line with daily prayers, fresh psalms, news, worship, zoom activities and new projects all at [nkchurch.org.uk](http://nkchurch.org.uk).

Talking of new projects, harvest is next week and we are going to offer a live zoom service and be in the sanctuary too if we can. All at 10.30 next Sunday and you can join us in the sanctuary or on Zoom. Email mail@nkchurch.org.uk or phone 0141 942 8827 to book a pew in the sanctuary any Sunday.

YouTube service and podcast and phone line services will carry on as normal but with a harvest theme.

In the bulletin, which you can download from the website if you don’t already receive that by email or post (email the church if you would like to receive it and don’t already) there is all our harvest information. There is an apple on the back page and we’d like to invite you to write across it a hope, a prayer a blessing for our community. Post them to us, or email a photo of them them or send that photo via instagram and we’ll hang them on the hall windows, on a great tree we’ll be building.

We also have a food bank appeal where we can spend different amounts on different packages of food and toiletries: on the website, and there is our Christian Aid appeal too. Twin tracks, global and local. Lots of way to be involved and be church and community.

So see you next time. Take care. Bye.