

Reading: Luke 15: 11 – 32

Sermon: The Cost of Faithfulness

When I started this week's sermon the phrase 'that was the week that was' came to mind but in a very positive way. I wasn't sure about using the phrase after I checked it on line because it was the title of a satirical programme in the 1960s which poked fun at all the politicians and any crisis or scandal in which they were involved and the song with which it began said: That was the week that was. It's over. Let it go.

Well, don't let this one go. This has been an amazing week in the life of our Church and no one is poking fun at us, mocking us or laughing at our efforts. On the contrary, we have had such positive feedback about different areas of our Church life and that has got to be encouraging.

Those who are using our hall are so positive about it and envious of our kitchen. The bookings are flooding in which can only be good and Messy Church got under way.

In the past, whenever we have tried to encourage children or families it has met with a lukewarm response. We never knew how many would turn up, if any. On a good day we could have nine children or thereabouts and on a bad day two or three or none at all. It was soul destroying, not just for us but for the children who came along although they did get our undivided attention!

However, on Thursday at Messy Church we had 27 children and 27 adults plus two babies. That is a turnaround and they loved it although I think the adults who were helping were shattered by the time they got home! I suspect some of the children were too! What's a bit scary is that there were another six children registered to come but who couldn't make it for various reasons, and there is a wee four old out there who is now telling all her friends how great it was which could mean an increase in numbers the next time – a scary thought. But I think we need to start fundraising again because if we go on like this, we'll need an extension built, never mind a Link Corridor!

But you know, this is new ground for us and an amazing opportunity to get to know families in our community, some of whom have little or no contact with Church but by no means all of them and it is great. The place was buzzing and that is the way it should be.

The other bit of good news is that our website is finally up and running again, thanks to Ian, and that is another way of reaching out into the community, of letting people know that the Church in Lochgilphead is alive and vibrant and part of this community.

I know some of you don't have access to a computer so I want to share with you the introduction I wrote for our website some time ago. I had

forgotten what it said but I'm sharing it with you because I was amazed when I read it again the other day and discovered that it is more or less exactly what I have been saying for the last few weeks.

I wrote: Welcome to our new look website. It's an integral part of our vision for our congregation and community which includes renewing our Building, renewing how people view our Church and indeed **the** Church, renewing our approach to outreach so that God becomes accessible to the man and woman and child in the street, renewing our faith and commitment to serve God and each other. It's a tall order but one we hope to be able to meet.

Things have to change. Our approach to worship and even to God is foreign to so many nowadays. The language we use is unfamiliar and we are somehow stuck in that mould. The time has come to break the mould, not so that all we do is foreign to those who worship with us week by week. We need to break the mould by finding a way out of the rut of familiarity and offering different opportunities at different times of the week using means that are familiar to the next generations. That is the challenge for those of us who struggle with touch screen mobile phones, let alone all the different forms of social media which are out there. I wrote this before I knew a touch screen mobile phone was called a smart phone!

However, the letter continues: Jesus told stories which were relevant to and understood by the people of his day. He used examples from their world. He spoke about water and wells. He spoke about fig trees and vineyards. He spoke about masters and servants, and as I said last week, he spoke about fishing. We need to follow Jesus' example and use the world we inhabit to share Jesus' message of life and hope and peace. How? Well, that's what we need to have the courage to work out!

That's what I was saying last week and although our first Messy Church was a success, there is room for improvement and we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We need to work together to find new ways of doing things and we need to inject life into our worship and into our service of God.

How? We need to work that out together but what I do know is that it pays to take a risk. We saw that on Thursday and who knows where that will lead.

On Thursday and again today with the children, I focused on the son who went away and who then returned to a great welcome from his father who then held a great celebration.

But there was another son, the one who had been there all along. The one who worked hard, who didn't let his father down, who was up early and doing the horrible jobs and working late into the night and, by jings, was he

crabbit when his lost brother came back. He was in the huff. He threw his toys out the pram and he wouldn't come to the party because the focus was on the one who had been lost and was found.

I feel for him because he just cannot understand why the fatted calf would be killed for that waster of a brother of his when there was no such reward for him and he had been slaving away for years. His efforts were hardly recognised as far as he was concerned. It was so unfair in his eyes but listen to his father's reply:

"My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

And in the parable of the lost sheep in the first part of Luke 15 it says: **There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent** or as it was apparently translated for the Inuit, 'more tail wagging in heaven' since they had no word for rejoice but had dogs that were happy after a hard day's work.

Does that rejoicing in heaven also seem unfair? Jesus came to save sinners. That is why there is rejoicing. That is why the fatted calf was killed. That is why I am on such a high this week. That doesn't mean that the rest of us don't matter but we receive God's blessing day in and day out and we are in some ways like the son who stayed at home.

That's not to say that there is a not a bit of the younger son in all of us. When we wander, there will be the same rejoicing on our return. For now, while we are here, it is our job to welcome back the younger son and in some ways it may feel as if we have been pushed into the back seat. If we feel like that, let's remember the older son and the father's words to him. **You are always with me and everything I have is yours.**