

MORNING SERVICE

1 February 2009, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

6th Sunday after Christmas

preacher: Rev. Martin Grashoff

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Sing for God's glory'

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'For the beauty of the earth'

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Readings : Genesis 2:4-8,18-25¹ & Matthew 8:28-34²

- 4 Such is the story of heaven and earth
when they were created –
- 5 when no shrub of the field was yet on earth
and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted,
because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth
and there was no human to till the soil,
- 6 but a flow would well up from the ground
and water the whole surface of the earth –
- 7 then the LORD God formed a human
from the dust of the earth.
He blew into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the human became a living being.
- 8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden,
in the east,
and placed there the human whom he had formed.
(...)
- 18 The LORD God said,
"It is not good for a human to be alone;
I will make a fitting helper for it."
- 19 And the LORD God formed out of the earth
all the wild beasts
and all the birds of the sky,
and brought them to the human
to see what he would call them;
and whatever the human called each living creature,

¹ *TaNakh. The Jewish Bible* (1985); slightly adapted.

² *New Revised Standard Version* (1989).

that would be its name.
20 And the human gave names to all the cattle
and to the birds of the sky
and to all the wild beasts;
but for Adam, *the human*, no fitting helper was found.
21 So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon Adam;
and, while he slept, he took one of his ribs
and closed up the flesh at that spot.
22 And the LORD God fashioned the rib
that he had taken from Adam into a woman;
and he brought her to Adam.
23 Then Adam said,
“This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken.”
24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother
and clings to his wife,
so that they become one flesh.
25 The two of them were naked,
the man and his wife,
yet they felt no shame.

(...)

28 When he came to the other side,
to the country of the Gadarenes,
two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him.
They were so fierce that no one could pass that way.
29 Suddenly they shouted,
“What have you to do with us, son of God?
Have you come here to torment us before the time?”
30 Now a large herd of swine
was feeding at some distance from them.
31 The demons begged him,
“If you cast us out,
send us into the herd of swine.”
32 And he said to them,
“Go!”
So they came out and entered the swine;
and suddenly,
the whole herd rushed down the steep bank

into the sea
and perished in the water.
33 The swineherds ran off,
and on going into the town,
they told the whole story
about what had happened to the demoniacs.
34 Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus;
and when they saw him,
they begged him to leave their neighbourhood.

Hymn : 'How excellent in all the earth'

Sermon

I was looking for something funny to start with and I decided to make it a little quiz. This is the first question:

What is the chief end of man?

Now who of you (still) knows the answer?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.

Do we still know where this comes from? Right, the *Westminster Confession*. I'm sure it's on your bedside tables... Now the most funny thing is, that this piece of reformed dogmatics is actually not too far from being true. The second story about creation, as we read it from Genesis 2 today, is actually about this: the place of human beings in creation.

Last week we learned that we should start all our thinking and acting from creation. God continues to create the reality we live in, and we are called to be God's fruitful co-creators. Creating is about making order and doing away with chaos. If we allow people, animals, nature and even material things to be and do what they should be, we will reflect some of the light that God has given to each and every part of creation. Actually, that is the point the *Westminster Confession* makes: if we live up to the image of God that the Creator has laid in our souls, then we actually glorify God.

Now this week we learn that the whole purpose of creation is: humankind. Everything is created for humans to use, to enjoy and to care for. Mind: enjoying and using always include responsibility and care. So, if we use too much, or if we do not share resources fairly, or if we use things for the wrong purposes, then we are wrong and we do not honour God. Because human beings are the crown on creation, they should behave accordingly. Those who have a noble title, should behave nobly.

So what does it essentially mean to be human? The story in Genesis 2

explains. The first being God created was an *adam*. The Hebrew word is rather graphic; you could translate it as 'blood & guts'. So, that is what we are. But the story continues. This human being gives names to all creatures, meaning it masters them all. So, as humans we are physical and we can think – but... is that all? No, it isn't, because God has to make one more, large effort to make the *adam* really human. God splits it. A side of *adam* is taken and formed into... a woman! So, the woman was first in creation, and the remaining part becomes a man. And together they are the *adam*.

Being human, having the nobility to master creation, includes being physical, just like any biological lifeform, having a mind to think (which we might share with other creatures), but moreover to be partners. *Perfect partners*, to be exact. That is the meaning of this second myth about creation. Far more than any scientific analysis it reveals the deep truth about being human.

To be honest, in this bible story 'being partners' is not identical to 'being married in the way British law defines it'. Hopefully married people are good partners, but we all know that it can be a problem, for many reasons, some of which are really strong reasons. On the other hand, not being married should not be of any hindrance to be perfect partners. And of course, on this earth perfection always comes with a wee bit of imperfection.

The story about Jesus sending the demons into the swine is touching on this theme. That is, if we read the story on a deeper level than just the literal meaning. If it was only for the literal meaning, the story would be quite incomprehensible and silly. We would probably end up with a formal complaint from both the RSPCA³ and the Christian Vegetarian Association, if with not direct action by the Animal Liberation Front. Those poor piggies!

Well, we would miss the point if we take the story literally. The same story is also told by Mark and Luke, but their facts simply don't match. For example, Mark and Luke tell us about only one demoniac, in stead of the two in Matthew's story. And according to Luke the swine don't drown in the water, but they rather smother in a swamp. Actually, Matthew gives us the most careful version. If this was about facts, the editors who put together the New Testament, would certainly have adapted the three versions to make them match.

The story's message can only be found if we look behind the literal meaning. Then we will see that we can read this story as a story about creation. The two men are not themselves. They don't look like children of God, but like demoniacs. Be careful not to equal that to any mental illness. Being a demoniac

³ Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

is not a health statement, but a way to tell what your deepest inner drive is. If you are a child of God that drive would be goodness, and you can see that from its fruits. These two poor souls have an evil drive. They destroy their world and themselves. They are eaten by the very thing that drives them.

Now Jesus restores creation. He sends the unclean spirits away. But where would he send these unclean spirits? Wouldn't it be appropriate to send them into unclean animals, like the swine? And wouldn't that end the cycle of destruction? Surely, because the swine drown in the water. In the bible 'water' rarely is just the stuff we call H₂O, there are always other meanings too. In this case 'water' refers to the dark waters under the earth (in the biblical imagery of creation), the dark waters of the abyss (which is a word Luke actually uses).

Jesus' creative action results in destructive spirits ending themselves in the water of death – and in two men being born again like the humans they once were. They surely have a story to tell! The healing Jesus brings is also a healing of creation, and that is the message.

And if we really feel for poor piggies, we might have a more critical review of where our own bacon is produced.⁴ Probably it's Dutch, and you would not want to see the inside of the sheds we call 'varkensflats', 'pig-flats' – or the living conditions of the animals.

So being God's co-creators, God's images on earth, we have a great responsibility and a great opportunity to make humanity shine like a thousand stars. The greatest gift is not our physical strength or health, nor our more or less brilliant minds, but the fact that we are called to be partners. Like Joseph in the musical, I don't believe in free love. We have also been members of christian communities for too long to be naive about how good it is to be brothers and sisters.

Being partners is the greatest gift God has granted us, but also a lot of hard work. We can tell that from our own various partnerships. And the most important thing is to be sure of the right drive to be partners. If it comes from God, the drive is goodness, and steadfast love, and compassion. Once we can build on that, we will truly know what it is to be human. And that will bring forth the fruits from which communities are built. Being truly human is the best way for us to glorify God.

I am looking forward to some great partnerships in Kintyre!

⁴ Eg.: http://www.ciwf.org.uk/what_we_do/pigs/state_of_eu_pigs/default.aspx or: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jan/06/animal-welfare-food-bacon>

Amen.

Hymn : 'All creatures of our God and king'

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

Closing Hymn : 'Christ is our light' (CH 336)

Blessing