

MORNING SERVICE

1 March 2009, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

1st Sunday of Lent

Fairtrade Week

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

hymns: Church Hymnary. Fourth Edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005)

Welcome & Intimations

Today we enter the time of Lent, the six days Sundays before Easter. Actually it started last Wednesday, called Ash Wednesday. It is also called the Forty-days Season, which refers to the Biblical number of forty. The old Irish and Welsh names still refer to this number.

(To make it 40 days exactly until Easter you need to apply a special way of counting: 6 weeks, minus 6 Sundays makes for 36 days, and then the 4 days from Ash Wednesday until the first Sunday bring the total to 40.) Almost all Western churches follow this tradition.

The Eastern churches, however start counting earlier and end on the Friday before Palm Sunday. (And, of course, their date of Easter is different too.)

There are many different customs during Lent, of which fasting and penitence are the most prominent. Protestant churches traditionally were quite reserved on this, saying that we cannot earn God's mercy by doing that. Anyway, Lent is a time of preparation and reflection. Sunday worship should be quiet and modest.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. In Holy Week the Thursday and the Friday are special days, with their own particular worship. This year in Chleit Church we will have an informal communion service on Maundy Thursday and silent worship on Good Friday. On Easter we will start with the early morning service on the beach.

So why do we call these six weeks Lent? That comes from an old word meaning 'long' and it refers to the lengthening of the days going up to Easter. Easter is not just a religious feast, it is also connected to the season of spring. Fresh flowers and little lambs also belong to Easter.

And what about the Easter bunny? Well, that is just a German invention and for me basically a temptation to stop being a vegetarian.

Opening Hymn : 'Lord, teach me all your ways' (CH 21)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Christ be beside me' (CH 577)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Readings : Genesis 9:8-17 & Mark 1:9-15 (*Good News Bible*)

Hymn : 'Spirit divine, attend our prayers' (CH 583)

Sermon

We have begun our journey together in West Kintyre by reading the stories in Genesis. We have learned that these myths really tell us who we are and moreover who we can be. They are not history, stories about something long ago, but they are stories happening right here and now. They reveal the truth behind the obvious facts of life.

The stories of creation – Genesis 1 and 2 – emphasise how good and wonderful God makes everything, every day anew. And we are called to be God's co-creators. Creation is not only about nature or art, it is about everything, down to the nitty gritty of everyday life. And the message is: 'Isn't it all wonderful!' But so often we overlook it, or just don't want to see it.

Now I would ask you to talk to your neighbour and tell each other what good and wonderful things you meet in your everyday life. Just 2-3 minutes, until the music starts.

(talk 2-3 mins)

(Do we want to share things?)

Then we continued reading about Adam and Eve – that's you and me – walking away from responsibility and thinking of themselves as gods. And about Cain and Abel – again: you and me – being taken away by anger and ending up killing. We need to emphasise that this does **NOT** mean that the goodness of the paradise stories all of a sudden has disappeared. It just means that in common life goodness, justice and truth always come mixed with the opposite. Too often the wonder will be wasted on our own anger, pride or plain badness. And too often we don't want to see that either.

I would ask you again to turn to another neighbour (or walk a few paces to someone else) and tell each other what evil you have seen spoiling the good life for God's children. I don't ask you to confess in anyway, but just try to be honest. This is the beginning of Lent and honest reflection is a healing thing.

(talk 2-3 mins)

Now this is the basic pattern of our life: we are here to live the good life on the good earth, together with all creatures great or small. *But* – reality is always mixed. Evil is always around, in systems in other people and in ourselves. What can we do about it?

We can leave it to God. That is more than just a devout phrase. God can provide, but we should never forget that God doesn't simply provide what we want. But still, we don't have to solve the problem of evil. That is ultimately God's job. All we have to remember is the rainbow in the clouds – and beautiful rainbows we have in the West of Scotland. The rainbow means 'never again' and it is our ultimate sign of hope.

Meanwhile all we have to do is to look for these millions of sparks of the light God has laid in creation. In ourselves, in others, in everything. Focus on the goodness, while being realistic about the dark side. Take these small steps to make our world more just, more peaceful, more God-like. Save one life, and as a consequence save a whole world.

We are in the middle of Fairtrade fortnight. Nelleke has been involved in Fairtrade for twelve years now. Realistically speaking Fairtrade is not going to make Sir Fred Goodwin change his mind, or put an end to the huge debts of developing countries. All the coffee in Colombia can not replace the cocaine production in the same country. And I would think that trading in a fair way also concerns our own small local businesses, working very hard to make an honest living.

But...!! Many churches are Fairtrade churches now, many councils only serve Fairtrade coffee and tea and the really big concerns, like Starbuck or Costa have it on their menu. Bill Gates is actively investing many of his many millions in computer training in developing countries. Things certainly are changing. And more important than production and trade figures is the hope that Fairtrade can bring to people, that one day things *will* be better. At the door you can pick up a copy of the World Mission Council's monthly magazine. It might bring you to new ideas. Small is beautiful, but only if you actually do these small things.

Amen.

Hymn : 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry' (CH 334)

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

Closing Hymn : 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' (CH 694)

Blessing