

MORNING SERVICE

12 April 2009, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

Easter Morning

Baptism

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Jesus Christ is risen today' (CH 410)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'This is the day' (CH 194 – *tune: The Lord's Day*)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Readings : Isaiah 25:6-9 (*new translation*) & John 20:11-18 (*New Jerusalem Bible*)

Hymn : 'The day of resurrection' (CH 413)

Sermon

[sing:] Always look on the bright side of life... *[whistle...]*

That was Monty Python's take on Easter, in the film *Life of Brian*.¹ Parts of christianity felt it was blasphemous. I don't think so. The film merely had a go at what the churches have made out of the Gospel. That may be felt as offensive, but it certainly made a point.

Easter is about the most profound joy, but it is not a happy crappy kind of joy. It is born out of the deepest suffering and despair. Easter is not about divine magic two thousands years ago. It is about restoring life here and now, among us in our daily lives, and against all odds. How can we connect to that?

I noticed that a number of important things were happening in the parish over the last week. All common things, but yet they did show a bright spark of new life, bringing in both hope and change.

Some people were very busy lambing and calving. (If they are in church now, they may be a bit grumpy for a lack of sleep – don't disturb them, please.) Others were worrying for a sick rabbit, but it got better. Yet others returned home after a time in hospital. That is always a good thing, but will things be as they used to, or do they need to accept new limitations? Someone noticed a lot of his bees did not make it through the cold winter, but now spring is coming there are new expectations too. A lot of children had their first week of Easter holiday. A whole day to build great things from your Lego! Finally, there were even some people who celebrated the Jewish Passover feast, on Wednesday evening and on Thursday.

¹ Brief introduction to the film and its critics in [Wikipedia](#).

All of this was, in varying ways, important for those concerned. Probably nobody noticed anything particularly special about it. Yet, it is in the midst of these kind of daily things that the unbelievable joy of Easter enters our reality.

The story goes that early in the morning, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. It is the third day after Jesus was crucified. The third day – the day when matters of life and death appear, in bible stories.

Peter and John have already left the empty grave to go home, but Mary lingers. And weeps. All there is, is an empty tomb. The men don't have a clue and just leave. Mary is caught in her grief. Blinded by tears she doesn't even notice the angels, or Jesus. To her the beautiful garden around the tomb seems a misty grey place. All the pointers are there – empty grave, garden, angels, Jesus walking the garden – but Mary cannot see. An empty grave: no death. A garden: the Garden of Eden. A gardener: God walking on the earth. But Mary doesn't see it. Without her Lord she feels she is nothing.

Then someone calls her name: 'Miriam!' That one word turns her whole world upside down. She is not a nobody – she is Miriam, a child of God. She is not an ignorant woman from the uneducated province – she is a disciple of rabbi Jesus, who is alive. No longer is Mary bound to the past, to her memories and grief. Here she is, standing in the Garden and the Gardener has called her by her name. Out of her totally dead-end life, a wonderful new life appears. Now she can see. Suddenly she sees an unbelievable vision of life as God wants it.

Let's be clear: the story about Mary's vision of Jesus is exceptional. It's very unlikely we will experience something like it. But in these seemingly simple things as I have mentioned, small glimpses of the same life as God wants it can appear. Lambs, calves and rabbits go their own natural way, but still it is a wonder, a part of God's good creation. Recovering from illness is normally not something special. But sometimes it touches us as a miracle, a graceful gift from God. Holidays are just dates on a calendar. But most likely they bring you the happiest memories which will last for a long time. Religious feasts, like Easter or Pesach, are recurring events and we already know the stories and the message. But sometimes, unexpectedly, they mark a major turn in your life.

Someone told this story about Easter.² He was one of the carers for Hans and his wife, who both had severe learning difficulties. Recently a dark past of abuse had emerged and Hans found it very difficult to cope with that. There was a lot of support, and talking, and praying. And also a lot of anger and grief. Then Hans decided to be baptised during the Easter vigil. The service started in a pitch dark church with the new paschal candle bringing in the light. 'The light of Christ!' Everyone had a little candle and from that single paschal candle the light spread through the whole church. Hans was the first to have his candle lighted, and while that happened the tears were

² Ries Nieuwkoop, *De drempel over*. Het gebruik van (overgangs)rituelen in het pastoraat (Den Haag: Voorhoeve, 1986) p32-35, slightly edited.

running down his cheeks. Now he could leave that dark time behind and walk into the light of a new life. Whenever after that night he would feel angry or depressed, the carers would simply say, 'Hans, it's been Easter!' And he would laugh. This *is* Easter!

Easter is not about the question whether or not someone came out of a grave. All the Gospel says, is that the tomb was empty. Easter is about absolute faith in the life God gives, even beyond death. That happens here and now in our own world. And whenever it happens, we know it is a miracle. All we say (or deny) about afterlife or resurrection is merely auxiliary. The faith of Easter itself is much simpler. It is like Mary hearing her name and all of sudden knowing that Jesus will be with her till the end of time.

The faith of Easter will move us, and change us. It will enable us to see through the darkness we know too well: economic crisis, violence on the streets or in our houses, people betraying each other, all the suffering people have to go through. The faith of Easter will give us the endurance and humour not to be intimidated by it.

Jesus is alive. God is with us. Whenever we teach or learn what God wants us to do, whenever we do our bit of healing for this world, whenever we dare to follow the way of Jesus, Easter is a brightly shining reality. Christ has risen! Hallelujah!

Amen.

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

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

[Baptism in Killean & Kilchenzie:]

Statement

Affirmation

Prayer

Baptism

Blessing : 'The Lord bless you and keep you' (CH 796)

Promise

Commitment of congregation

Children's welcome

Prayer

Closing Hymn : 'Thine be the glory' (CH 419)

Blessing