

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 28 June 2009, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

4th Sunday after Pentecost

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'The earth belongs to God alone' (CH 18)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God' (CH 641)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Maker of heaven and earth,
Giver of life,
Spirit in this world,
we thank you –
for the beauty of the earth,
for the miracle and wonder of life,
for the greatness of our world.
Beauty we find
in amazing sunsets
and in wee bunnies;
wonders we encounter
in miraculous recovery
and in waking up every morning;
greatness we see
in the amazing things we can make
and in the power of a microchip.
We thank you for all, O God.
And we ask you to teach us this lesson,
again and again,
every time we refuse to take it in,
every time we damage or destroy the mystery,
every time we wished we were in a different world.

And now as Jesus taught us, we pray:
Our Father...
...Amen.

Readings : Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (*Good News Bible*) & Matthew 6:19-7:12 (*colometric translation*¹)

¹ A colometric-concordant translation. See: F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse theologie. 1,1 Schrift-lezing*. Een verhandeling over de kolometrische weergave van bijbelse teksten als hulp bij het lezen en als grondslag voor de exegese (Kampen: Kok, 1980) – probably a good reason to learn Dutch. Some information about

[Matthew 6:19-7:12:]

- 19 Do not gather treasures for yourself in treasuries on earth,
where moth and rot ruin them, [cf. Isa. 51:8]
and where thieves break in and steal;
20 but gather treasures for yourself in treasuries in heaven,
where no moth and no rot ruin them
and where thieves do not break in and do not steal;
21 for wherever your treasure is,
there your heart will also be.
22 The lamp of the body is the eye;
if, therefore, your eye is healthy,
your whole body will be full of light;
23 but if your eye is evil,
your whole body will be dark;
if, then, the light in you is darkness,
how deep is the darkness!
24 No one is able to serve two lords,
for either he will hate the one and love the other,
or he will adhere to one and despise the other;
you are not able to serve God and Money.
- 25 That is why I say to you:
do not be anxious about your life,
what you will eat or what you will drink,
and not about your body, what you clothe it with;
is not your life more than food,
and the body more than clothes? –
26 watch the birds of the heaven, [cf. Job 12:7]
because they do not sow, and they do not reap,
and they do not gather into barns,
and your heavenly father feeds them; [cf. Job 38:41]
are you not of more value than they? –
27 and who of you is able, by being anxious,
to add one cubit to his length? –
28 and why are you anxious about clothing? –
learn from the wild flowers in the field how they grow: [cf. Ps. 103:15]
they do not labour and they do not spin...
29 but I say to you:
even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these; [cf. 1 Kings 10:4ff]
30 if, then, the grass of the field,
which today is there, and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, [cf. Ps. 90:5f]
is dressed like this by God,
will he not do much more for you, you of little faith? –

colometry, as distinguished from stichometry, in classical texts was already in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition (1910 pass.), now on [Wikipedia](#). More can be found in: Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts Of The Greek Bible. An Introduction to Greek Palæography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), which is on [Google Books](#) now.

31 therefore, do not be anxious, saying:
what will we eat?,
or: what will we drink?,
or: how will we array ourselves?
32 for after all these things the nations seek, –
indeed your heavenly father knows that you are in need of all these things! –
33 but you shall first seek the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. [cf. Ps. 37:4, 25]
34 Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will be anxious about itself;
sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

1 Do not judge, that you *be* not judged;
2 for with the judgement with which you judge,
you will *be* judged;
and with the measure with which you measure,
you will *be* measured.
3 Why do you watch the speck in your brother's eye,
and do not notice the log in your own eye?
4 or how will you say to your brother,
'Let me throw out the speck from your eye',
when, look!, the log is in your eye? –
5 you hypocrite, first throw out the log from your eye,
and then you can watch closer
to throw out the speck from your brother's eye!

6 Do not give what is holy to dogs,
and do not throw your pearls before swine,
lest they trample them under their feet,
and, turning around, rip you up.

7 Ask, and it will be given to you,
seek, and you will find, [cf. Jer. 29:13f]
knock, and it will be opened to you;
8 for anyone who asks, will receive,
and he who seeks, will find,
and to him who knocks, it will be opened; –
9 or is one of you such a person, that,
if his son asks for a bread, he will give him a stone?
10 or if he asks for a fish, he will give him a serpent? –
11 if you, then, although you are evil,
know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more
will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

12 Therefore, whatever you wish that the people would do to you,
you should do the same to them,
for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Hymn : 'Courage, brother' (CH 513)

Sermon²

Today we have heard Jesus' third lesson in the series that we call the Sermon on the Mount. It made me think of our two boys coming home from school, just 5 or 6 years old, proudly singing their first song in English: 'Don't wuhhie, be heavvy'. Of course it was useless to correct their pronunciation – the Miss herself had taught them to sing it their way. But although they sang it wrong the first time, the message was absolutely clear: they didn't worry about a thing, but were perfectly happy.

Actually I could say 'Amen' at this point. Because Jesus' lesson today is actually as simple as this. We just should stop being worried and treat people as we would wish to be treated. Life really *is* simple and the rest is explanation. (Amen.)

Well, let me add some explanation.

The first lesson was a lesson on love. Beginning from carefully chosen Bible texts, Jesus explained how we can reconcile each other and do justice in this world. That was about our human relations. The second lesson did not start from the Torah, but from our own spiritual resources: deeds of kindness, prayer, fasting. That is about our relation with God, as the deepest source of our life. Today's lesson starts from the other end of the scale: our daily life in this world. Our world itself, through the culture we are living in, provides us with wisdom and skills that can help us to reveal God's heavenly kingdom on earth.

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Now I have said something dangerous! Is our culture that good, that it can provide knowledge of God? Actually, we should be very careful about it. In Germany before the war this was the dominant theology: christianity was supposed to have permeated the German culture so strongly, that this in itself was good. Religion and culture were almost synonyms. Therefore the Lutheran church had no defence whatsoever against the Nazi ideology. Since that came forth from the most Germanic roots of German culture, it had to be accepted, and the official church has shamefully done so. For that reason the Confessing Church, which was lead by prophetic preachers as Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Martin Niemöller, and the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, took a firm standpoint: never ever should christians easily ride the waves of culture, be it modern or ancient. Instead they should focus on Christ only, who, as the Word made flesh, teaches us to reject and resist the gods of nature and culture. As Bonhoeffer's life and death have proven this deep trust in Christ as the only way for christians was all but harmless piety. Many ministers and lay people *did* what they preached, even if that would cost them their lives.³

² Main source for this sermon: Maarten den Dulk, *De bergrede*. Steunpunt van de vrijheid (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001).

³ Wikipedia has some good articles on [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), [Martin Niemöller](#), [Karl Bath](#), the [Confessing Church](#), and the [Barmen Declaration](#).

To be honest, my theological training in Amsterdam got a bit stuck in Barthian theology, and I think Karl Barth would expect us to think for ourselves and move on. But the point he made in the years of Nazi ideology is still very much alive. Even today similar ideologies, like that of the BNP in Britain or Mr Wilders in The Netherlands, seem to flourish. We must know that Christ came to save and reconcile *the world*,⁴ not just the Middle English or the Purely Dutch part of it.

So, when Jesus teaches us to value the world itself as a source of wisdom about God and humans, he does that in a fundamentally critical way. As John reminds us, telling us Jesus' grand prayer for his disciples, that we are *in* the world, but not *from* this world.⁵ Being in the world is our one vocation, but at the same time we learn to look further than only the things of this world.

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How to make the right distinctions? Jesus is very practical and down to earth. Since we live *in* this world, we should freely take advantage from its wisdom.

First: don't fill your life with gathering treasures. (Had Jesus known our current tax system, he might have emphasized this even more.) Because if you go for money, for power, for glamour and glitter, for always being the winner, you will be torn in two. How can you practise christian love while you are busy beating others? You cannot serve two masters. You will only become greedy and want more and more and more. (And remember: Jesus is not talking to Sir Fred, but to us.)

Second: don't worry. Of course there is plenty to worry about, and we will just have to deal with that. But worries should stay incidents and not become an attitude. To be fair, Jesus' rule not to worry goes straight against the sentiments that seem to dominate our days: our fear for anything that could possibly threaten us and our corresponding fixation on security. We fear to catch swine flu, to lose our job, to get stuck with our mortgage, to become old, not to be the best, etcetera. And security should avert all these fears. But Jesus is absolutely right: the only remedy against fear is... not to worry. A deeply spiritual and a very worldly skill. Just don't worry.

Third: always remember that what you give is what you get. If you seek with an open mind, you will find. If you dare to act – knock on the right doors – new opportunities will open up. If you ask others to help or correct you, you will find the better answers. Jesus teaches us not to be too easily satisfied, but always to invest the best of ourselves. Without fear or greed.

And Jesus concludes this lesson with a statement, which we usually call the 'golden rule': *whatever you wish that the people would do to you, you should do the same to them*. These are words descending from heaven, or even out of the blue, but actually

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:18f; John 3:16f.

⁵ John 17:11-15.

Jesus is using an ancient Roman proverb. The difference is that he puts it in the positive: 'what you want to happen, to you do that to others', while the Roman original said it in the negative: 'what you do not want to happen to you, do not do that to others'. Still, Jesus' use of a common proverb is made a summary of Law and Prophets.

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Jesus' third lesson very much affirms this world as our natural environment. In no way should we try to get out of it – as the early christian hermits did, retreating to the Egyptian and Syrian deserts.⁶ We are invited to use this world's wisdom – but... filtered through the critical approach of the bible. The bible tells us not to build on what we think we possess – it can be gone tomorrow. Nor to have our lives brought down by endless worries – that makes us blind for the goodness in creation. And finally to give the best of ourselves – for when we give we will receive.

This third lesson of the Sermon on the Mount is very down to earth. But the main purpose is to reveal God's vision of the kingdom of heaven right here on earth. Let's go for that!

Amen.

Hymn : 'Be thou my vision' (CH 465)

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

We pray to God
for those who suffer from this world –
because they are systematically excluded
from its resources, wealth and wisdom;
because they are dragged into
the whirlpool of fear and worries;
because illness brings their lives
under a constant threat;
because they have become addicted
to gather more and more things.
God of this world,
liberate them from greed,
free them from fear,
save them from despair.
And help us to become your signs of hope
in this wonderful and confusing world.

In silence we remember those we know
who need us to remember them.

⁶ See Wikipedia for a very brief introduction to these [Desert Fathers](#).

(silence)

So we pray to God, our Maker,
through Jesus, our Teacher,
with the holy Spirit, our Guide.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'How excellent in all the earth' (CH 4)
Blessing