

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 5 July 2009, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Communion in Kilcalmonell

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Here to the house of God we come' (CH 195)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'One more step' (CH 530)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Readings : Isaiah 61:1-4 (*Good News Bible*) & Matthew 7:13-28 (*colometric translation*¹)

[*Matthew 7:13-28:*]

- 13 Enter through the narrow gate,
 because wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction,
 and there are many who enter that way;
- 14 how narrow is the gate and how troublesome the road that leads to life,
 and there are few who find it.
- 15 Beware of false prophets,
 the ones who come to you in sheep's clothing,
 but inside they are ravenous wolves;
- 16 by their fruits you will recognize them; –
 are grapes picked from thorns, or figs from thistles? –
- 17 so every good tree makes good fruit, [*cf. Isa. 5:24*]
 but bad trees make evil fruit;
- 18 a good tree is unable to make evil fruit,
 and a bad tree does not make good fruit;
- 19 every tree that does not make beautiful fruit,
 is cut down and thrown into a fire;
- 20 so, indeed you will recognize them by their fruits.
- 21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord',
 will enter the kingdom of heaven,

¹ A colometric-concordant translation. See: F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse theologie. I,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 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.

22 but the one who does the will of my father in heaven;
 many will say to me on that day,
 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name,
 and did we not throw out demons in your name,
 and did we not do many mighty deeds in your name?'
 23 and then I will declare to them,
 'I never knew you,
 go away from me, you workers of lawlessness.' [=Ps. 6:9]
 24 Everyone then who hears these words from me and does them,
 will be like a wise man,
 who builds his house on the rock;
 25 and the rain comes down, and the rivers come, and the winds blow,
 and they fall on that house, [cf. Ezek. 13:13f]
 and it does not fall, for it has been founded on the rock;
 26 and everyone who hears these words from me and does not do them,
 will be like a foolish man,
 who builds his house on the sand;
 27 and the rain comes down, and the rivers come, and the winds blow,
 and they fall on that house, [cf. Ezek. 13:13f]
 and it falls, and its fall is great! [cf. Job 1:19]
 28 *And it happens, when Jesus completes these words,*
that the crowds are astonished at his teaching,
 29 *for he does teach them with authority,*
and not as their scribes.

Hymn : 'Praise the Spirit in creation' (CH 588)

Sermon

The narrow gate and the wide gate. If you are over fifty you will certainly remember the pictures of this: two roads leading to two gates, one broad, one narrow. And like me you will probably have wondered why we were supposed to follow that winding way to the narrow gate. Because the broad way to the broad gate was serious fun: sunshine, good pubs, cinemas, dances, people having a good time. Alas! we were supposed to attend the Sunday School and Mission Hall, skip the fun and finally stumble over St Peter. Well, I bet we all have been sinners since. Good!

In case that would ease your mind: I don't think this is what Jesus meant to say. He definitely was serious, but that is not the same as being boringly holy. What Jesus does is sending out his disciples – and today he is sending us. We have to be on the road. Jesus has completed his first lessons and now it is no longer the teacher's part, but the students'. *They* have to make it work. As Jesus explained the Torah, they – and we! – will have to spread the good news. As Jesus drew from his own spiritual resources, so we will have to learn and practice our own ways of kindness, prayer and fasting. As Jesus used the world's wisdom, we will have to. But Jesus gives us, through his disciples, good advice before we start off.

Actually it *is* about finding the narrow gate first. But – thank God! – that is not at the end of a joyless, boring and sore life. The gate is narrow, because that particular gate only fits one of us, and no-one else. You can only live your life well in the one way that fits you best. This is the first step in becoming good followers of Jesus: take responsibility for your own life.

Instead of using – or rather: abusing – words from the Torah and Jesus' explanation of it to target others, we should apply them to ourselves and do what they say. That is not a matter of feeling guilty about the things we do wrong, or do not even do at all. Absolutely not! It is about honesty and truth and about being our own man or woman. Honestly applying the words of the Bible to ourselves means that we take responsibility, and that is the first step towards real freedom.

Of course that is a bit scary. We will all remember our first day at school, and then at the secondary school, and in our first job. Scary days, probably. But that is the only way to get on with your life. Of course we discovered that the gate is narrow, because it took us many years before we really found our own place and particular course in life. Probably we made a few mistakes too. So what? How can we learn anything without failures?

This is Jesus' first advice: dare to take your own responsibility, because that will give you freedom.

Next Jesus warns us for the religious fanatics. He calls them 'false prophets'. Who are they?

False prophets are the ones who abuse the words of Torah and Gospel to manipulate others. What they say may sound very true, because they know their Bible and skilfully pick the texts. They make you think, 'If the Bible says it, it must be true'. 'But look at the fruits of their religious zeal', Jesus warns us. They make people feel very guilty and not worthy of anything good. They feed peoples' fear. Fear for those who have a different faith or religion, for strangers, for the powerful in our society, for communists, for Jews, for Arabs, for homosexuals, for the end of the world, for God – basically for anyone and anything outwith the small circle of the few chosen ones.

I'll give a Scottish example. In 1647 General Leslie defeated Alexander MacDonald, either near Clachan, or closer to Rhunahaorine, where the old Largie Castle stood. Leslie led the Covenanting army sent by Parliament to deal with the, mostly catholic, royalist Highlanders.² After his defeat MacDonald fled to Gigha and Islay, but a part of his army, mostly Kintyre men, including many MacDougalls, withdrew on Dunaverty

² There were personal issues at stake too: James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, who was the leader of the royalist forces, thoroughly distrusted and opposed Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyll, who sided with the Covenanting party, initially with stunning success, but after the bloody battle of Philiphaugh (September 1645) the Covenanting forces and Argyll were clearly on the winning hand. Another personal vendetta was the one between the MacDonalds and the Campbells. In 1646 the MacDonalds, with the committed help of Irish mercenaries, had been routing and killing all over Argyll.

Castle at Southend. There all 300 were killed after they had surrendered. It is not totally clear what happened, but most likely the Covenanting army chaplain, Mr John Nevay, had been preaching fanatically and unceasingly, threatening Leslie with divine curses if he would not slay all of the men in Dunaverty. Mr Nevay clearly preached death.³

So, Jesus' second advice, to his disciples and to us, is to be critical at all kind of religion that may descend upon us. The advice is not to look at the principles, but at the outcomes. Good faith leads to good life, healthy fruits, lasting peace. If that is not the outcome, we should not trust that religion, regardless how convincing it may seem.

Following this advice Jesus even goes one step further. He says,

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord',
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but the one who does the will of my father in heaven.*

Finally Jesus advises us, that being religious is not the most important. We might even skip it. Since it is all about the fruits of our praying, working and learning, *doing* the will of God is more important than indulging in worship. Deeds of kindness are more important than prayers or creeds. Of course, the point is: how do we know what God wants us to do? And the answer is: 'Find your own narrow gate' – your own particular gifts and capabilities to do kindness to yourself and others. And the way to find it is to study the Bible and to live prayerfully. But still: the *outcome* is the most important.

And that is like building on a rock. That rock is not the Church, as something sent from heaven. It is not any creed or doctrine or hymn, regardless how thorough or beautiful. It is not even Christ himself. Jesus says, the one rock is to *hear these words from me and do them*. Jesus' teaching is very, very Jewish, but the big difference is that he brings it out to all nations – eventually even to us, today.

If you *do* the things God asks from us, there will be justice, and peace, and wholeness. That is how we build *a house where all can safely live, a rock of faith and a vault of grace, a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone.*

*Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
all are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*⁴

Amen.

Hymn : 'You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd' (CH 355: 1, 3, 4)

³ This according to Sir James Turner, who was in Leslie's army, in his evidence given during the trial against Argyll in 1661.

⁴ Hymn by Marty Haugen (*Church Hymnary*, 4th edition, 198).

Offering brought forward
Prayer of Intercession

[Communion in Kilcalmonell:]

Intro

Invitation

Narrative

Prayer of Thanksgiving & The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Consecration

Communion

Prayer after Communion

Closing Hymn : 'I have a dream' (CH 710)

Blessing