

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 12 July 2009, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Sea Sunday

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations¹

Opening Hymn : 'God who formed the mighty ocean'²

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'When I needed a neighbour' (*Church Hymnary* 544)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Praise be to you, O God,
for those who bring us food, clothes, toys
and all the others things we enjoy;
for those who build ships,
for those who sail these across the seas,
for those who make the connections,
around the globe and around the clock.
And shame on us, O God,
if we forget or neglect them,
and take their toil for granted.

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

Readings : Leviticus 19:33-34 & Luke 10:25-37 (*Good News Bible*)

Hymn : 'Will your anchor hold' (*Church Hymnary* 737)

Sermon

'That is very kind of you.' It is a simple, quite common phrase we can hear almost every day. But surprisingly it was not one of the phrases I have learned in school. Perhaps it was too common, or just not important enough?

¹ For this service worship resources have been used which were provided by the Sailor's Society (non-denominational), the Mission to Seafarers (Anglican) and the Apostleship of the Sea (Roman Catholic). See www.sailors-society.org.

² Words by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926), to the tune 'Ode to Joy' (*Church Hymnary* 173).

How common it may be, kindness is a fundamental value. It breaks through our lines of self-defence and self-assurance. Kindness means you are giving instead of taking, accepting instead of demanding. Kindness heals our hurts and brokenness.

In Jewish tradition it is said that the world is build on two pillars: study of Torah and deeds of kindness. That equals the answer Jesus receives from the teacher of the Law. Everlasting life equally requires a love for God and a love for our neighbour. The true connection with God cannot exist without true connections with other people, and vice versa.

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But that teacher of the Law is not satisfied by this answer. *Who is my neighbour?* he asks. To his first question Jesus made him give the answer by himself, but now he wants Jesus to answer a more difficult one.

Behind this question there is a whole discussion hidden which is long forgotten, but actually still very relevant. In Jesus' days this was about the question whether or not non-Jews were to be treated as brothers and sisters. Would Roman soldiers who occupied the land and oppressed the people have to be seen as neighbours? Or king Herod and his family who deeply offended and abused religious Jews? And how about the Samaritans, who also claimed to live by the Torah, but refused to accept the priests and teachers in the Temple as legitimate? Romans and Herodians have long gone. Samaritans still exist in current day Israel, as a very small minority in Galilee, but they are Israeli citizens now.

Although the situation has changed a lot, we can easily fill in other names for those who are alien or hostile to us: 'the Germans', 'the Russians', 'the Muslims', 'the Chinese', or even 'the English'. It's always about a group, a 'the', and it's always about using stereotypes and caricatures. Just as in Jesus' days our time is full of others, 'the likes of'. So for us too the question asked by the teacher of the Law is a serious one. Who is *our* neighbour?

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Jesus' answer is typically rabbinic. He tells a story, a situation from daily life, but with an unexpected twist. Robberies on the road to Jericho were probably as common as knife crimes in Glasgow, Birmingham or London. Or as fights among the seamen on a ship, sometimes using their knives as well. And the fact that priests or other temple officials would not touch a dead person, or even someone who seemed to be dead, was also according to custom.

The twist in the story is a double one.

First the Samaritan is the one who does the deed of kindness the Torah would ask in this situation. He checks the man, and as soon as he sees that he is alive, he treats his wounds and brings him into safety. He even pays for his lodging and promises to

cover extra costs if need be. The Samaritan however is exactly one of those 'others', the ones who were not considered to be neighbours to the teacher of the Law and the vast majority of his fellow Jews. The one who is not supposed to be our neighbour becomes the one who is a true neighbour to us.

And there is the second twist. Jesus reverses the question. Instead of asking who *our* neighbour is – meaning: who could we ask to help *us* – Jesus asks who acted as a neighbour towards the man who was robbed. Being neighbours is not about who could come to our help, but about whom we should help. Actually, that teacher of the Torah understands the message: he answers this question correctly, be it without mentioning the Samaritan directly.

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Do sailors need our help? They are able seamen, chief officers and first engineers in their own right, isn't it? Sure they are. And they are also just as vulnerable and imperfect as we all are. Life on a ship is stressful and comes with serious hazards. Every nick in economy directly effects the shipping trade. Every year about 300 ships are taken by pirates, not only by Somalians, and some 900 seamen are taken hostage. Last year at least 20 of them were killed. I do not know the number of sailors who are in prison, because smugglers sneakily attached drugs to their ship's hull.

But even without pirates or smugglers life can be dangerous enough. Our son is sailing for about seven years now, mostly in the less dangerous lines of shipping. I think they have lost about two men, and they were very lucky not to have serious accidents, but often that was a matter of sheer luck. At various times his ship could have broken in two, ran into the ground by another ship, or simply sunk by heavy storms.

This year the economy has hit the shipping trade pretty hard. Many ships are laid up in a port, and many crews just have to wait what happens. Many lost their job. Those who have to stay aboard often are not allowed to leave the ship, but if wages do not come from a bankrupt ship owner, and food and fuel run out, there is a serious problem. If ships are still sailing, the usual problems like bullying, racist behaviour, illness and being homesick will continue. And of course there will always be quite a few ship owners who treat their crews in very poor ways (to say it politely).

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The churches' port chaplains and all the volunteers around them take up Jesus' question: Who is a neighbour towards seamen? The answer comes especially through personal encounters. Pastoral care, worship, helping to sort out problems. Chaplains and volunteers have heard Jesus' teaching – as we have listened to the Sermon on the Mount over the past Sundays – and they are bringing that into practice. A modest job, yes, and no, it will not change the economic order or the way shipping business runs. But it really is very important. Because, as we know, if we can save one neighbour, we will save a whole world.

My father has been a chaplain to dredgers for some thirty years. In a way it has helped him to keep his faith. The good outcomes of his work were not grand theologies or renewing worship – although it surely did influence his worship and theology – but the best outcomes were simple deeds of kindness. Listening to stories the men could not tell to anyone else, alerting human resource departments for problems that needed to be dealt with, comforting widows, just being a good neighbour. Probably this is how everlasting life comes to people: bit by bit, kindness by kindness.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Brother, sister let me serve you' (*Church Hymnary* 694)

Offering is brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

Thanks be to you, O God,
for the goodness you show us every day,
for creating your world from day to day,
for loving all your people just as much.
God of love, hear us,
AND INCREASE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

Thanks be to you, O God,
for all the things the earth provides:
food and water, fuel and materials –
and for our skills to work with these,
even if that brings in danger.
God of love, hear us,
AND INCREASE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

Thanks be to you, O God,
for all the running waters:
the burns, the lochs, the sea and the mighty ocean –
and for our skills in mastering and sailing these,
bringing goods and people to every place on earth,
even if that comes with hardship and toil.
God of love, hear us,
AND INCREASE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

Thanks be to you, O God,
for all who sail the seas,
who work around the clock,
through all kinds of weather,
and do not see towns or chapels for weeks or months,

and also for those working in the docks,
those maintaining the lines of communication,
and the crews on lifeboats and lighthouses,
who maintain safety and offer rescue –
and for port chaplains and volunteers
who visit the ships, run their chapels,
help those who found no-one to help them.
God of love, hear us,
AND INCREASE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

We pray to you, O God,
for seafarers who are sick or sad,
who face the dangers of piracy,
who are subject to the brutal forces of the sea,
who are alone in hospital, far from home,
who are kept in prison,
often not just for their own fault.
Give to them, O God of love,
the light and hope of Christ within them,
coming to them through the care and compassion
of all those involved in the churches' ministry;
and make us contribute wherever we can.
God of love, hear us,
AND INCREASE OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

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

So we pray,
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Eternal Father, strong to save' (*Church Hymnary* 260)

Blessing