

## MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 20 September 2009, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

*16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost / Rosh Hashanah 5770*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

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

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### Welcome & Intimations

**Opening Hymn** : 'O God, our help in ages past' (CH 161)

### Children's Talk

*[on Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year – extra info for those over 12 years of age:]*

From [Biblical Gallery](#):

The command to blow the shofar is given in the Torah without explanation, but Rabbis have provided many interpretations to the meaning of the Shofar. Maimonides (Jewish philosopher and physician born in Spain in the 12<sup>th</sup> century) writes:

'Awake, sleepers from your sleep! Arise, slumberers, from your slumber! Scrutinize your deeds and return to repentance and remember your creator! Those forgetters of the truth in the vanities of time and those who stray all their year in vanity and emptiness which can neither help nor save. Look to your souls, better your ways and deeds. Let each one of you abandon your evil way and your thoughts which are not good.' (*Hilkhoh Teshuvah, Ch. 3*)

The shofar symbolizes the major theme of the Days of Repentance, during which we commemorate the beginning of the world. We try to make a new start within ourselves, and to return to the beginning of the cycle. The shofar, with its powerful and profound calls, removes the obstacles before us and helps us reach this new start.

From [Kerk en Israël](#) (translated):

In four different ways the shofar is sounded:

- *tekiah* = one, long blast, a call to reflection
- *shevarim* = a stuttering tone, three short blasts, a call to destroy evil
- *teruah* = a crumbling tone, series of short blasts, symbolises the destruction of evil
- *tekiah gedolah* = an extended long blast, meaning 'be vigilant!'

[Biblical references](#) regarding the shofar:

Abraham offered the ram instead of his son. (*Genesis 22:13*)

With the sound of the shofar waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him. (*Exodus 19:19*)

When the shofar is sounded, hear, all you inhabitants of the world. (*Isaiah 18:13*)

The great shofar shall be sounded and they that are dispersed shall worship God at Jerusalem. (*Isaiah 27:13*)

Shall the ram's horn be sounded in the city and the people not tremble. (*Amos 3:6*)

With trumpets and sounds of the shofar, praise the Lord. (*Psalms 98:6*)

## Children's Hymn : 'Spirit of God unseen as the wind' (CH 600)

### Prayer & Lord's Prayer

<sup>1</sup>Who is like you, merciful Father,  
who with mercy grants his children life.  
We bless you, God of eternity,  
for granting us time to live  
and for loving us even beyond death.  
We bless you, O God,  
for your gift of time –  
<sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.  
Much of this we cannot understand,  
but still we bless you, O God,  
who wakes us up in time  
to test our faith and save our souls.

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

**Readings** : Genesis 22:1-19 (*story retold*<sup>3</sup>) / Hebrews 11:17-19 (*Good News Bible*)  
(Genesis 22 will be read in synagogues too, since it is part of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy; the horns of the ram refer to the ramshorn which is sounded on New Year's Day.<sup>4</sup>)

**Hymn** : 'The God of Abraham praise' (CH 162)

### Sermon

The story of Abraham's sacrifice is a very important one, both for the synagogue and the church. A story with far-reaching effects too.

However, it's not necessarily only serious. Once there was a parish with two ministers, who absolutely could not stand each other. At some point one left for another call. His farewell text was carefully chosen: he preached on Genesis 22:5a, *And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass...*

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<sup>1</sup> With some inspiration from the Siddur and Jonathan Sacks' [message](#) for Rosh Hashanah 5769.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:2-8

<sup>3</sup> Nico ter Linden, *The Story Goes...* 1: The Stories of the Torah (London: SCM, 1999), Chapter 23 'Abraham's sacrifice', p89-93)

<sup>4</sup> An example of how liberal Jews connect this awful story to Rosh Hashanah, can be found [here](#).

In Jewish tradition the story is known as the 'binding of Isaac' and Isaac became the strongest symbol of Jewish suffering and Jewish faith. Especially throughout the persecutions in medieval Europe (including England), the pogroms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire, or the 20<sup>th</sup> century shoah in the Nazi-camps this story embodied the indestructible hope that the God of Israel in the end would see and save. And whether the world likes it or not, 1948 was the year that centuries of hope did materialise in the founding of state of Israel.

In Christian tradition the story met with a very different perception.<sup>5</sup> According to the church fathers – already having silenced the mothers in church – Isaac was only a foreshadowing of Christ. In a famous sermon Caesarius of Arles, for example, a monk and archbishop in 6<sup>th</sup> century France, interpreted all elements in the story towards that conclusion.<sup>6</sup> According to the bishop the third day refers to the resurrection of Christ, and the Trinity; the two servants symbolise the people of Israel, left behind for their lack of faith; the ram is Christ, the 'true Isaac'; the wood which Isaac carries is the cross upon Jesus' shoulder; Mount Moriah is identified with the grave of Adam and Calvary. Isaac, says Caesarius, was only a foreshadowing, because he was not really sacrificed, but Christ was.<sup>7</sup>

The Christian interpretation of the story made it a very dangerous one. The words literally killed their victims. They labelled Jews as not really existing. And those who do not exist can easily be rejected and doomed.

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This is the lesson we should really learn: once we know how to divide between chosen and rejected people, between those who really exist and those who are really non-existing, things will go terribly wrong.

If Jews can be deported, then homosexuals and gypsies and mentally ill will follow – as recent history has shown. If Jews can be blamed for all the wrongs in the world, then tinkers, tramps, hawkers and foreigners can be targeted too – as live history is still showing today.

This, of course, is not what we want. But to change our attitudes and behaviour, we

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<sup>5</sup> A good – alas: Dutch – introduction is: M.F.G. Parmentier, *Isaak gebonden, Jezus gekruisigd*. Oudchristelijke teksten over Genesis 22 (Kampen: Kok, 1996) [Christelijke Bronnen, Vol. 9]. A serious study for those who are not easily scared off, also including the Quran's version of the story and comments on anti-islamic Christian exegesis, is: E. Noort, E. Tigchelaar (eds.), *The Sacrifice Of Isaac*. The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2002) [Themes in Biblical Narrative. Jewish and Christian Tradition, Vol. 4].

<sup>6</sup> About Caesarius of Arles († 542) see [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarius_of_Arles). Genesis 22 is explained in Sermon 84. See: Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*. Translated by Mary Magdaleine Mueller (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press [etc.] 1956-1977) [Fathers of the Church, Vol. 31, 47, 66]. Note that Caesarius says that Genesis 22 was already a common part of the lessons during the Easter Vigil.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, right after this he says something more puzzling: Isaac refers to Jesus' divinity, because he does not die, while the ram who really dies, refers to Jesus' humanity. Obviously Caesarius did search for true understanding and did not treat the story as a simple crossword riddle.

should learn from Abraham. He showed faith and kept it till the hour of ultimate decision. He was ready to sacrifice his very fear, let go his will for power, cleanse his cynical mind. Instead he chose for the hope and faith that this world is not bound for sheer disaster, but for the good life with God and all people. If people manage to survive the Nazi-camps and still have this faith, it must be stronger than the rocks and stones of Scotland itself.

Suppose Caesarius is right after all, and Moriah can be linked to Calvary, then the words from Hebrews make sense: God is able to raise from the dead. And then today's lesson is as simple as Desmond Tutu told the General Assembly in May: God's love in Jesus embraces all people, all... all... all...

Amen.

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

### **Offering brought forward**

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

God of all times and all people,  
we thank you for all the good you give us,  
the good that we can freely share  
as an offering to you and the world.

And we ask you to wake us up,  
and make us work hard on overcoming divides –  
fights in families,  
bullying at school,  
sectarianism in society,  
the deep gap between poor and rich.  
It is not us who can simply solve these issues,  
but still we need to do what we can.  
Support and challenge us, O God.

We ask you to remember your people,  
in Israel and in Palestine,  
so that they dare to live on hope instead of fear,  
faith instead of hate and cynicism.  
Teach your people with mercy, O God.

We ask you to remember your people,  
in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland,  
our own people,  
so that they can find new hope to live by,  
instead of being intimidated by all the news  
about crisis and flu and crime and terrorism;  
make them daring and humorous,

ingenious and generous,  
Teach your people with mercy, O God.

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

So we pray,  
by the faith of Abraham, father of all believers,  
and by the love of Jesus, son of his Father.  
Amen.

**Closing Hymn** : 'You are before me, God' (CH 96)  
**Blessing**