

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 11 October, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

19th Sunday after Pentecost / Simchat Torah

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Lord of life we come to you' (CH 782)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'God is love: his the care' (CH 193)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

God of life,
on this day we call out your Name –
to make us a blessing
for those who are in need of healing;
to make us willing to learn
with those we meet today;
to urge us to be just
where injustice is all around;
to use words of truth and peace
when lies and hatred are spread.
God, in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God of love,
we call on your Name –
to be with us this day.
Be present
through words spoken and deeds done;
be present
as the one who shows us the way;
be present
in the holiness of all life on earth.
God, in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

As Jesus taught us we pray:
Our Father...
...Amen.

Readings : Deuteronomy 34:1-11 & Luke 24:13-14, 30-35, 50-53 (*Good News Bible / King James Bible*)

Hymn : 'Lord Jesus, think of me' (CH 492)

Sermon

When do things end? When are we afraid of things to end? What could we imagine about what happens after things have ended?

Our calendar goes on year after year. We have constructed a point where it begins, but before that we can simply count backwards as long as we like. In fact the calendar of our world has no clear beginning, and moreover, no foreseeable ending.

The church's calendar is slightly different: it's a circle. As soon as it ends it starts all over again. The Sunday we sometimes call 'Christ the King' (if we are kind of highchurchy) is directly followed by the first Sunday of Advent and thus the whole liturgical year starts all over again.

To be honest, the church did not invent this by itself. It comes from the synagogue. Today is Simchat Torah, the feast of Rejoicing in the Torah. In synagogue Deuteronomy 34 will be read, immediately followed by the reading of the first verses of Genesis.¹ Our learning never ends, nor does God's involvement with his people. In the same tradition the original ending of Mark's Gospel points us back to its beginning.² You need to read the story of Jesus again and again, and, doing so, gradually learn more about the mystery of his being alive among us.

The kind of calendar without beginning or end can be a bit scary. Because we grasp that things *will* end in some way and at some time. A circular calendar gives a different feel: the end is also the beginning. On the calendar of the church you know what will be coming next, although every year will be different again. Just try for a moment to think of all the different Christmases you have had. If all works well, every new year repeats the old on a different, possibly higher, level.

On a never-ending calendar eternity may look pretty bleak or even scary, but in the round calendar of the church it is more a matter of continuing to spiral upwards. However, neither of these two calendars can answer the question what is beyond the point where things end.

¹ Basic information about Simchat Torah can be found at [Judaism 101](#).

² Originally Mark ended at 16:8, which seems a bit odd ('for they were afraid'). But in chapter 16 there are several pointers that suggest to read the Gospel again in order to gradually understand it. Probably the composition of Mark was based on a 1-year cycle of readings, parallel to the (then also 1-year) cycle of Torah readings in the synagogue, as my late professor Dick Monshouwer has researched, following Michael Goulder. See: D. Monshouwer, *Markus en de Torah*. Een onderzoek naar de relatie tussen het evangelie en de synagogale lezingen in de eerste eeuw (Kampen: Kok, 1987) [with a summary in English]; or: M.D. Goulder, *The Evangelists' Calendar*. A Lectionary Explanation of the Development of Scripture (London: SPCK, 1978). Goulder reads the Gospel as Midrash on the liturgies of the Jewish festivals and calendar.

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We have read about the end of Moses' life. Is Moses' end a happy ending?

Yes, it is. His vision and strength remained unshattered till the very end. At last he really saw the Promised Land.

And no, it is not a happy ending. Because, although Moses can see the Promised Land in full, he is not allowed to enter it. On viewing it he dies. Throughout the Torah we can find different explanations as why that happened. One story says it was because Moses struck a rock with his staff, instead of speaking to it, to give the people of Israel water.³ Moses himself is reported to have said that he was just too old to enter the Promised Land.⁴ And some texts suggest that Moses' solidarity with the rebellious people of Israel denied him access.⁵ Whatever the reason may be, in the end Moses will not enter into the future he has always believed in. No happy ending, we would say.

But still Moses' end is all but unhappy. He has completed his task by giving the Torah in full to the people of Israel. Giving form to the Torah by building a community on its foundation and by living the words, is not Moses' task. That is for those after him, and still today the Jewish people have to work on that, especially in the land of Israel where justice and peace should reign for all nations.

Moses' end is mysterious, because nobody ever knew his grave, but actually it's not that strange compared to our endings. Like Moses we will rarely see the full harvest of what we have sowed. Like Moses we all die on this side of the river that separates us from the Promised Land. Like Moses we all have to let everything go in the end and leave this world as we came: all by ourselves. Our endings contain the same kind of mystery as with Moses.

Moses' grave is in Moab, the land of Israel's arch-enemies. But look: it's *opposite the sanctuary of Baal*. The living word of the Torah – Word of God, Gospel – will always oppose the gods, the powers that be, spreading slavery, death and robbery. Even in his death Moses keeps the Word alive.⁶

Those after him have to carry the work further. Joshua is the new leader. For those who want to hear it, his name links us, followers of Jesus, directly to Moses: Yehoshua > Yeshua > Iesos > Jesus.

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³ Num. 20:11f.

⁴ Deut. 31:2.

⁵ Deut. 1:37, 3:26 and 4:21.

⁶ A note on Deut. 34:10. Most translations have it that the LORD speaks to Moses. However, [Rashi](#) interestingly [comments](#) that this can also be read the other way around: Moses spoke to YHWH whenever he thought the time was right. Rashi connects Ex. 32:30 ('I will go up to the LORD') to Num. 9:8 ('I will hear what the LORD will command'), thus making clear that addressing God automatically includes an attitude of listening.

But Jesus is also gone. His two followers, walking towards this village of Emmaus, just cannot understand it. Jesus is crucified, he died and Joseph has buried him. The early morning vision of the women only confuses them more. This must be the end of all Jesus' signs and wonders, isn't it?

Then, while they are talking, Someone begins to teach them from Scripture. And they take it up. Later they realise it was *like a fire burning inside* – the holy Spirit at work in daily life, words flaming like white fire. Learning from the Word of God is the way to know Jesus is alive. And so is the building of true community in the sharing of bread – daily food – and wine – symbol of feast.

But Jesus being alive remains a mystery. He *is* alive in teaching and learning, in building community, in true love in action. Like Moses he does not have a grave anybody can point at. Like Moses he died by the Word of God. But now, look how he finally departs from his followers. While he is teaching, while he speaks words of blessing, he is suddenly gone forever. Some manuscripts, but not all, add *and he was taken up into heaven* – as if we would know what is beyond our ending. Still, where else could he be? For us the most important thing is to continue his work: learning, teaching, preaching, healing, blessing, doing justice. In that Jesus will be with us, alive and working.

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When do things end? When do people end? Hopefully when their task is completed and their lives are fulfilled. We know too many have their lives ended before that. We have to go on in our own strength. If we do, if we dare to stick to the vision of a Promised land, a Kingdom of God, if we persist in learning and working, the end will become a new beginning, even if it is painful.

That is why we keep reading stories from the Bible that we already heard dozens of times before. That is why we continue to build on our communities and families. Because God is the God of new beginnings.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Will you come and follow me' (CH 533: 1, 2, 5)

Offering and Dedication

⁷Father, Son, and holy Spirit,
we dedicate to you
our thoughts, our words,
 our gifts, our deeds,
the working of our hands,
 the thinking of our minds,

⁷ *Common Order 1994*, Fourth Order for Morning Service, adapted.

the loving of our hearts.
Shield us for the sake of Christ,
keep us from offence,
and compass us with your love.
Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

God of Moses and Joshua,
we thank you for your Word.
As high as it is,
it fully connects to our daily life
and guides us in our work and life.
We thank you for positive news:
new jobs possibly coming to Kintyre,
a picture of our triplets in the newspaper.

God of Jesus and Peter,
we remember those who were hit
by the earthquake in Padang, Indonesia;
thousand casualties are thousand human beings like us.
We remember our soldiers killed in action,
for whom we have responsibility,
and we remember those caught between the fighting parties.
We remember our politicians,
gearing up for the next elections;
may they think of the people they serve,
rather than the herd of voters they want to catch.
We remember church leaders
struggling between unity and honesty.

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

So we pray,
with Moses and Joshua,
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Lord of all hopefulness' (CH 166)

Blessing