

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 17 January 2010, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

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

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Jesus' hands were kind hands' (CH 351)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

God our creator and sustainer,
we praise you for giving us the earth:
steady rocks to build on
and good land to grow crops and feed animals –
and we pray for those in Haiti
who felt the earth shake under their feet
and who by far don't have enough land to feed themselves.
God in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God we praise you for all the life you give:
birds in the air and in the fields,
seals and fish in the seas,
cattle in the byre and pets in our houses,
and more than that, all the people around us –
and we pray for those abusing animals or people,
for those who lost their loved ones through accidents,
for the people of Haiti who were buried under rubble.
God in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

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

Readings : Deuteronomy 8:1-4 & Luke 4:1-13 (*Good News Bible*)

Hymn : 'O Love, how deep' (CH 354)

Sermon

Yesterday I did something I have never done before. I used peer-to-peer technology to download a whole DVD of computer games. And, to Nelleke's great surprise, I actually tried to play a game. I haven't done that for the past ten years. I'm not a gaming boy.

The game I started was called 'Soldier of Fortune'. A voice told me I was John and I was to go down into the subway and fight a bunch of very violent gangsters who had taken hostages. So down I went. Bullets were already flying my way. I quickly found out how I to move around and fire a gun. It took a bit more time to learn how to aim that gun properly. But then I really got the hang of it and rushed up and down corridors and stairways, shooting my way forward. And then the game stopped. The voice said, 'You failed your mission, John. You shot too many friends.' I clearly failed the test.

So I learned two things: downloading with P2P is fun, and I really don't like shooting games. Failing this test was actually quite alright for me.

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Passing the test. That is what the story from Luke is about. Usually this story is said to be about the 'temptation' of Jesus. That makes it sound as if this is about giving in to naughty things. But it really is not the kind of story many tabloids would love to have on the frontpage. The ones with a fair deal of sex, drugs or rock 'n roll.

Jesus is *tested*. That is what the Greek word (and also the Latin word of the medieval Bible) actually means. The test is performed by *the devil*. That is not the personification of evil, as a kind of independent dark power over against the goodness of God. The 'devil' is the one who always screws it up. It is that nasty and mean feature we all know too well that spoils the party, that makes people lose hope and trust, and generally feeds our cynicism and indifference. Can Jesus resist all that?

The test is three-fold. First about feeding only your body or also feeding your mind and soul. Second about whether or not Jesus would go for power. And third about knowing what you should not ask from God.

Jesus passes all three tests.

We cannot live on bread alone, he says, referring to the Torah. That means: that there is bread and there is bread. The first is about the daily food we all need, but it means little without that other bread: God's Word that nourishes our inner life.

Then Jesus simply refuses to grab the power he might have taken. Because he knows that power will always take you once you think you have it. Power corrupts and there is only one remedy against it: know that God is greater anyway.

The third test is perhaps the most tricky one. The devil starts quoting the Bible. But it does not come any further than a few random Psalm verses, and Jesus answers with Torah. He basically says: 'Don't take every word literal, but know what you can and

cannot ask from God.

After this test the one who loves to screw things up retreats. Jesus passes the test as one who knows about both material and spiritual life, who can resist the temptation to gain power, and who does not try to manipulate God. That makes him strong.

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Now the question is: when and how are we tested?

We are tested whenever we have to set our priorities and chose our loyalties. What do we chose: a flashing career or a good life? Who do we care for: those who are useful for us, or all of our neighbours? What is life about: about wealth or health? And on all occasions our personal devils can have many forms.

Being depressed is a strong devil. It blocks us from seeing the light, the goodness, the blessing. It can make us deeply pity ourselves. It locks out hope and love and faith. Winston Churchill called it his 'black dog'.

Thinking we need to save the world is another devil. It makes us lose a realistic view on life and the problems we face. It pushes us to think of ourselves as gods. 'If only I had the power, I would...!' Yes, what exactly?

Being very religious is yet another of our devils. That one suggests that we can make God do what we want. And it very cleverly hides itself under loads of pious words and deeds.

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Can we stand the test? I feel I regularly fail. It is easy not to see someone else's hurt or need. So often we do not listen carefully enough. Too often we go for our own comfort and pleasure and skip the extra mile for others.

Yet, it does not help me to fret on my failures. George MacLeod famously said, 'Next time, fail better!' We have to face failures only to ask ourselves how we can avoid to repeat the same mistake.

Well, there is light after all. I do feel I successfully passed my first gaming test. I noticed how easy you get dragged in the virtual reality of tough guys and hard fights, but at the end I knew I just do not like it. One point earned.

Now we could all ask ourselves where we passed the test recently. Were we there when someone needed us? Good! Did we manage not to envy somebody for having something we don't have? Even better! Have we resisted the temptation to have power over others! We will surely get there! Just make sure next time we fail better.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Jesus tempted in the desert' (CH 338)

Offering and Dedication

Prayer of Intercession

God be with us
when we are tested in real life.
Make us help when help is needed;
make us restore where things are distorted;
make us love each other unconditionally.
God in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God be with your people
when they have no roof to protect them,
when the earth is shaking,
when all safety seems to vanish.
And be with those who come to rescue and help,
that they may do whatever they can
and may help the poorest to survive.
God in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God be with those not far from us,
when January is yet again a dark time,
when their house is cold and empty,
when jobs and mortgages are a burden,
when they worry for their children in the night.
God in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

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

So we pray,
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'The church is wherever God's people are praising' (CH 522)

Blessing