

## **MORNING SERVICE**

Sunday 14 February 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

*Last Sunday after Epiphany*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

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

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### **Welcome & Intimations**

**Opening Hymn** : 'Let us build a house' (CH 198: 1, 2, 4, 5)

### **Children's Talk**

**Children's Hymn** : 'There's a spirit in the air' (CH 616)

### **Prayer & Lord's Prayer**

We praise you, O God, for the light.

The light of the sun,  
splashing the hills with shades of gold and green,  
colouring the sea silver and grey and blue,  
making sunsets of fire,  
and shining warm on our face.

We praise the light of day,  
making mornings start brighter  
and afternoons last longer,  
making work and leisure enjoyable.

We praise, O God, your light which enlightens us,  
when we really understand each other,  
when we learn and teach forgiveness,  
whenever we know we are part of your whole creation.

And we pray, O God,  
that you forgive us for not always seeing the light,  
and for darkening it through our clumsiness.

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

**Readings** : Exodus 34:29-35 & Luke 9:28-36 (*English Standard Version*)

**Hymn** : 'Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation' (CH 261)

### **Sermon**

It was Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> of June, 1981, and I can remember it like yesterday. I mean: I

probably forgot the date 2 weeks after, but the other day I asked Nelleke and she promptly recalled the exact date, and why she could. But as I said, I do remember that day very well. It was our friends' wedding. But again, long ago I forgot most of what happened on that joyful day.

The one moment I never forgot was when Nelleke made a phonecall. She tried to do it secretly, but that was quite impossible in a room filled with wedding guests. She phoned our GP, and I could read the answer from her face before she said a word. She simply radiated joy all over her face. For a moment the message totally overtook her outlook. The GP had said, 'Yes, of course you are pregnant.'

Me being me, I can forget dates and names and places just like that. Nelleke has always been my backup memory. But moments like the one in that house in Groningen – I did remember the place! – will never be forgotten. And of course we could not keep it a secret and our friends shared in our joy.

Our faces can show what is on our mind. Of course we can train ourselves to hide that. But body language, like faces, looks, gestures or postures, often are more telling than the words we utter. Body language can show very well that you actually mean something else than what you are saying. Often the message is in the things we do not say. Often we show more through our body language than words can tell.

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Both Moses and Jesus seem to be showing more than words can tell. The people of Israel, and even Aaron, are frightened by what they see, and the disciples just talk nonsense. Both stories are amazing, if not simply weird.

Remember: this is biblical storytelling. It is not a factual report of what literally happened. The message is not in the facts – assuming we could define facts in these stories anyway – but in the things that radiate from the story. It is not in the black fire of the letters themselves, but in the white fire in between the lines. We need a bit of holy spirit to hear the message.

From the point of view of modern historians we cannot be sure if Moses was the historical person the Bible talks about. In the character of Moses a lot of experience of the whole of the people of Israel is embedded. But this kind of Bible analysis only helps us to understand the letters, the black fire.

The message digs much deeper. If people are touched by a word from God, or even, as in Moses' case, by *the Word of God*, they will be changed. Words from God can be things said, or sung, or prayed. It can certainly come to you through silence, or the voice of the wind and the sea. But more important, words from God will be things that happen to you, like someone showing love or mercy. Sometimes these things can be too wonderful, and we call them 'a miracle'.

The story in Exodus has puzzled people for a long time. As we see it now the story

says that Moses' face was radiant. Please do not try to picture that literally – it will destroy the story and turn Moses into some kind of green Martian. For me, I think of Nelleke.

The word we translate with 'shine' was interpreted differently for a long time. People thought it meant 'horned'.<sup>1</sup> So if you come across older paintings or statues, like the one made by Michelangelo, you will see Moses with two rather funny horns on his forehead. That's what happens if you take the Bible too literal.

The message is clear however: if you are touched by God's Word like Moses was, you will look different. Your body language, your words and your deeds will be fully inline. You do as you say, you can tell why you do it, and both words and deeds will show God's goodness to others. So indeed, you will radiate light.

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Jesus is the same. His disciples have seen it. Asking what 'really happened', we may think of a vision they had. They fell asleep and when they woke up it was like a dream. And some dreams can be more real than life. Something like that.

The message again, is clear: like Moses Jesus is touched so deeply by God's Word that it makes him radiant with light. His face is telling, and even without words he makes himself absolutely clear. The disciples hear it as clear as if someone spoke it in their ears: *He is my chosen one* – or, as some manuscripts have it: *my beloved one – listen to him*.

The Law was given to Israel through Moses. Now Jesus is about to bring it out to all the people on earth. In case the disciples, all being good Jews, would be scared of that, they are already told: *Listen to him*. God's light cannot be caged in one temple. It needs to shine all over the earth.

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Faces can be telling and body language often reveals more than we are aware of. Good news will make us radiant with light. A common message like 'you are pregnant' can do that. It can happen any time when we hear news that is deeply touching and mind-blowing. God's Word can do that.

However, it will not do so if we only accept it as a religious experience isolated from daily life. God's Word is not confined to any church – we should not even assume it is automatically here anyway.

God's good news comes to us with every newborn baby, showing the beauty and power of life itself. (And if you like, you can include lambs, calves and bunnies too.)

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<sup>1</sup> Actually the Hebrew word does mean 'horned', but traditionally in Exodus 34 it is translated with 'radiant'. However, the Latin Bible, the Vulgate, had 'cornatus' ('horned') since the days of Jerome.

God's good news comes to us if Bible stories really touch us. (And that may require some effort on our side.)

God's good news comes to us if laws are enabling justice, if jobs are coming to Kintyre, if creation is really sustained. (And we may need to train ourselves to read the news differently to discover this kind of good news.)

Nelleke and I were very happy with a dryly conveyed lab result. That was Maarten, our eldest son. He brought joy and worries to our house, as every child does. But the good news that radiated from a face almost thirty years ago is still around. Amen.

**Hymn** : 'You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd' (CH 355)

### **Offering and Dedication**

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

God we pray for people and places  
that are deprived of your light:  
people made small and bent down by poverty,  
people making themselves ugly through abuse of power,  
people who lost any hope for tomorrow.  
Be with them, O God,  
comfort them and encourage them,  
and send others to support and challenge them.  
May your words reach those who need it most,  
may words bring light into their darkness,  
may deeds of mercy touch their hearts,  
may the light of understanding strengthen them.  
In a world of plenty  
we remember the billions of have-nots;  
in a country of peace  
we remember the hundreds of places  
where war and crude violence rule –  
and we pray for justice to be done,  
for peace to come.  
As we remember this world, O God,  
we ask that you remember it with us.

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

So we pray through Jesus Christ,  
who brought God's light to the world.  
Amen.

**Closing Hymn** : 'Lord make us servants of your peace' (CH 527)

**Blessing**