

## **MORNING SERVICE**

Sunday 21 February 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

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

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### **Welcome & Intimations**

**Opening Hymn** : 'We plough the fields' (CH 229)

### **Children's Talk**

**Children's Hymn** : 'All creatures of our God and king' (CH 147:1-3)

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

Thank you, God,  
that we are made welcome.  
We are welcome in the homes we live in,  
in the places where we work and learn,  
among family, friends and strangers.  
We praise you, O God,  
for being welcome.

We confess  
that we sometimes fail to welcome others  
in the way we could be expected to.  
We confess  
that by not welcoming others,  
we do not welcome you, O God.  
We confess  
that we do not always welcome Jesus  
as our Teacher and Host.

<sup>1</sup>God of all seasons,  
in your pattern of things  
there is a time for keeping  
and a time for losing,  
a time for building up  
and a time for pulling down.  
On this first Sunday of Lent,  
as we journey with our Lord to the cross,  
help us to discern in our lives  
what we must lay down

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<sup>1</sup> *Common Order 1994*, p431f, adapted & shortened.

and what we must take up;  
what we must end  
and what we must begin.

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

**Readings** : Deuteronomy 26:1-11 & Luke 4:14-15 (*Good News Bible*)

**Hymn** : 'Dear mother earth' (CH 147:4-7)

### **Sermon**

Some time ago a man said that “the indigenous British people” have been living on this island for over 17,000 years. And because of that they can claim the first rights on everything. They can also simply deport millions of people living in Britain but born in another country. That man is a fool and a bigot, who has no understanding whatsoever of Britain’s past. His talk is venomous and a threat to justice and peace as they have been tested and proved in many centuries of British history.

When Nelleke and I came to Iona the very first thing we encountered was hospitality. It came naturally from islanders – the ‘indigenous’ ones – and from Iona Community staff and members. People from all places on earth met more or less at random, but each and everyone was welcomed.

Of course we knew what hospitality was, but on Iona we really learned what it meant and how important it is. Hospitality reaches out to everyone, regardless if you like that person or not. The hospitality we received and witnessed made us feel deeply grateful. It happened to us on Iona, and it happened again when we worked in Carnwadric and Maryhill – and again when we arrived here in Kintyre.

That is how and why Scotland became our home. We were truly welcomed and our response was to be hospitable for those who come to our house. It’s a simple thing, but it actually is how commitments and communities grow and flourish. Scotland is our home, and our loyalty lies with the people in Scotland, even if we also have ties with the places where we were born and the people we have lived with before.

But we do not possess Scotland. We are guests. Or, as Abraham once said, *strangers and sojourners*.<sup>2</sup> Still we are part of this country and its people. And if we pay attention we can easily spot a lot of ‘strangers’, even Scottish ones. Recently we learned that about a million people of Dutch nationality have Scottish ancestors who once came as strangers to the land of absolute flatness and never left it. And that’s just the Scots who only crossed the North Sea. Many millions more crossed the seven seas.

If we can learn one thing from history, it is that people have always moved from place

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 23:4.

to place. Sometimes of their own free will, often forced by circumstances. We all occupy the lands we live in, but even if we legally own a part of it, we still are the occupants rather than the owners. Ownership is not set in stone, nor is it for eternity. Just think of all the deserted crofts and abandoned estates.

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Of course there are people who do not have a land of their own. For example the Romani, the Travelling People, or the Jews. It was explicitly told to the people of Israel: remember that your father was *a wandering Aramean*...

Deuteronomy is one of the five books of the Law, the Torah. They teach the people of Israel how life *should* be lived, especially in the Promised Land. The books offer guidance and set out commandments, they do not give a historical review.

We do not know what literally happened when the people of Israel occupied the Promised Land. Some of our brighter historians even doubt if there has ever been an occupation in the way the Bible tells us. Possibly it was not a great campaign, but a gradual process in which poorer tribes who lived up in the mountains came down and over the course of time occupied farms, villages and towns. Occasionally that would have included a fight, but more often things settled rather peacefully. Quite similar to the way it happened in Argyll when Irish or Norse settlers arrived.<sup>3</sup>

Well, whatever. It's not really important what really happened. The thing that does matter is that this commandment tells Israel how it should occupy its Promised Land whenever it does so. Either in 1500 BCE, or in 1948, or in 2010. They cannot claim everything and just do with it whatever they like. Their very first harvest has to be an offering to God.

This is to teach them that the land is *given* to feed and house the people, and the right answer to that is thankfulness. The land is also given to feed and house the *strangers and sojourners*, and again the right attitude to that is thankfulness. There will be enough for everyone and they need to share.

This commandment is given to the Jewish people. But we cannot walk away from it either. We too have to accept the land and the houses that we occupy as *given* to us. And we ought to be thankful. And we need to share the rich fruits of our land, as well as the fruits we can afford to buy elsewhere. Because when we share, everyone will have a better life, and our country will be closer to being a Promised Land. For ourselves and for the strangers living with us.

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Jesus walks the land and teaches the people. He gets praises for his teaching. But suppose he would proclaim freedom to slaves, bring good news to the poor and heal

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<sup>3</sup> See Marion Campbell, *Argyll: The Enduring Heartland* (Isle of Colonsay: House of Lochar, 2001, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.).

the blind – would the people who are not slaves, or poor, or blind, still praise him?

It's nice to say things clearly and eloquent, but once these words begin to urge us to take action, to change our lifestyle and ask us to give things up, we might get irritated or upset. Jesus brings us the Gospel, but the Gospel is not a nice and cosy message of easy harmony. The Gospel brings the commandments given to Israel out to us. And we need to listen.

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Nelleke and I found a lot of hospitality. That was Scotland's message to us. We were accepted with our odd ways of speaking English. (Please correct me whenever I shoot a billy goat...)<sup>4</sup> We were welcomed in the jobs we did and do. Our neighbours, Scottish and Indian, welcomed us. We were invited to ceilidhs and into homes. The gifts we could bring were really appreciated.

Why would we refuse others, from different countries, but with *their* own gifts and talents? Of course there will be problems. That's just part of life. Language, customs and expectations need to be in sync to make things work.

But the bottom line is this commandment to be thankful for all the good our land and our people bring in. Argyll has welcomed and absorbed many strangers throughout the centuries. Sometimes with a fight, far more often in a gradual process of adapting. Celts, Vikings, Normans, Irish, English, Travellers, and even Dutch have become part of Scotland.

We are still grateful for hospitality and welcome. And that simply means that we want to be hospitable and welcoming to others. That is just something practical we can give back. But it is also a glimpse of how a country can become a Promised Land. Any country can, if the people want it. Thanks be to God!

Amen.

**Hymn** : 'The reign of God' (CH 343)

### **Offering and Dedication**

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

In prayer we remember, O God,  
the strangers and foreigners among us;  
those who came  
because their work brought them,  
those who came  
because they had no reason at all to stay where they were,  
those who simply drifted to our shores.

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<sup>4</sup> Double Dutch ('een bok schieten'), which means 'make a bloomer'.

We pray that you may be their God,  
their refuge and shelter,  
and we pray that we make the connection,  
and even go the extra mile if need be,  
to make them part of this country and its people.

In prayer we remember, O God,  
the personal things that bother or worry us.  
The empty place at our table,  
the relations that broke down,  
the expectations that did not work out,  
the feeling of being trapped where we are,  
the dourness of wintertime.  
We ask you, O God of mercy,  
to be with us, simply being there,  
and to encourage and inspire us  
to sort our lives out and get on,  
for better or worse,  
until life will shine again  
as you have made it shine  
from the beginning.

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

So we pray  
through Jesus Christ  
who leads us on the way to the cross,  
and moreover: beyond it.  
Amen.

**Closing Hymn** : 'When I needed a neighbour' (CH 544)

**Blessing**