

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 28 February 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

2nd Sunday of Lent

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'The earth belongs to God alone' (CH 18)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Morning has broken' (CH 212)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

We praise your name, O God,
for the hope and trust you have given us.
We hope for
a world that is fairer and juster,
a community that is stronger and more caring,
a church that dares to speak and act.
We hope, O God,
for comfort when we grieve,
for healing when we are hurt,
for reconciliation when we are caught in fights.
And we praise you, O God,
that we can trust our hopes for the future.
God in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

But we confess,
on this second Sunday of Lent,
that often we don't dare to hope,
that we don't take the risk of trusting others.
We confess
that our nuclear arms
can be a threat to others' peace,
that our way of trading
can take away any hope among the poor,
that our obsession with security
can ruin lives and gravely feeds our fear.
God in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

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

Readings : Genesis 15:1-6 & Luke 13:31-35 (*Good News Bible*)

Hymn : 'Jerusalem the golden' (CH 747)

Sermon

I remember this wee boy, 4 years old, I think. His mum brought him to the children's ward where I was working as a trainee nurse. Next day he would be operated on his eyes. He was just a wee bundle of loneliness and fear in that bed after his mummy left. But without any reason given he came to me, grabbed my hand and did not leave my side till he went to sleep. Next day, after the operation, with one eye bandaged, he immediately spotted me again, grabbed my hand and did not let go until his mummy came.

That is how trust works. You simply do it and hang on to it. Amidst all the frightening things and strange people on that ward, this boy just trusted that I would keep him safe. Simple trust, steady going.

Some years later we travelled across Yorkshire hills, dales and moorlands, Nelleke and I with our children. We were backpacking, carrying our full camping equipment with us. Our children, 5, 8 and 9 years old, just had their sleeping bags, waterproofs and a canteen in their packs. When we asked in the morning, 'Where will we be sleeping tonight?', our daughter confidently said, 'Oh, just in our tent'. No worries whatsoever about finding our way, or a good place to pitch three tents. They just trusted us that every thing would be alright.

Again an example of simple trust that kept them going. Even though the first three weeks were mostly filled with rain, and we really started to wonder if this hike was a healthy plan.

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This is what Abram's story is about: simple trust. But for Abram that was much more difficult than it often is for children. Abram had grown older and wiser, and moreover: sadder. He had left Haran in strong spirits and with firm hope. But after all these years all he had was a fading hope, going against the grain of natural expectation.

So what does his God give him? Heavenly signs? No. If you read the story further, all there is, is a haunting, dark ritual. Does God provide evidence? No. Abram is simply reminded of the promise: 'You will have a son'. And like a child gazes in wonderment at the stars in the night, Abram is told to do so. And so, the story goes, Abram simply trusted God.

Hope and trust are the basis of Abram's future and faith. Without warranties, without what we would call clear facts, he just has to go. Even if it would not happen in his lifetime, still he should be hoping and trusting till his last breath.

Could we do that? Could we build our lives on hope, even if reality seems to undermine all of it? Could we trust others, even if some will abandon or betray us? Could we hold on to the enchantment and wonderment we experienced when we were children?

This is not about something superficial like the power of positive thinking.¹ It is not about neglecting the negative sides of life and instead taking positive things for the only facts that count. Life has very negative, dark sides. Chronic illness, death, accidents, depression, addictions, broken families – it's all in the game and there is nothing nice about it.

The point is, that hope and trust can prevent us from mistaking the dark side of life for the real facts. Because losing hope and not trusting anyone are so easy. There are so many reasons for it.

Still, the story says, *Abram believed the LORD*. That means that he faced the facts that seemed to reject his hopes, but still he refused to lose it. This is something far deeper and stronger than only looking on the bright side of life.² And that may be something we can inherit from our children.

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The question is: what do you do when hope falters or trust is betrayed? Then, like Jesus, you lament. But you can only lament something if you love it. Jesus loves Jerusalem, its Temple, its people. But he does not avoid the facts he sees: Jerusalem will bring his end.

Last week I came across an article titled 'I envy the people who hate Israel'.³ It was written by an Israeli journalist who feels deeply betrayed by the 'blunders', the 'self-satisfied blindness' and the 'self-destructive policies' of his government. No wonder

¹ Famously and notoriously found in: Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power Of Positive Thinking* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952).

² As biting commented upon Monty Python's film *Life Of Brian* (1979).

³ Bradley Burston, 'I envy the people who hate Israel', Haaretz 19/02/2010. Can be read on-line at: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1150799.html>

Quotes: [opening:] "At times like these, I envy the people who passionately, frankly, with all their hearts, despise Israel. Hate Israel enough, and the Jewish state's failings and blunders, its self-satisfied blindness and its resultant self-destructive policies, cause not pain, but delight. Hate Israel enough, and you're spared all inclination to try to fix what's wrong, to work to set it right." [conclusion:] "I have come to envy the people who hate Israel, because they cannot feel the tragedy in the phenomenal possibility, the depth and breadth of humanity that is going to waste here. Someday soon, if only because Avigdor Lieberman is indicted for money-laundering in countries which hate us, this is going to begin to turn around. I believe that. I have to. My father did not flee the Soviet Union just so his son could one day have the chance to live in a place just like it."

many people hate Israel, he says, and how on earth can we still believe in the 'depth and breadth of humanity' that should be ruling the country? Still he is hopeful that a turn will come soon. Why is he hopeful? Not because of any heavenly sign, or any evidence, but as he says, because 'I have to – my father did not flee the Soviet Union just so his son could one day have the chance to live in a place just like it'. This is hope that accepts the facts but refuses to accept that it has to be like that.

Lamenting the facts that contradict hope is useful if it leads to action. For Jesus it leads to accepting his cross because he believes that God will save him, even beyond death. Jesus' lament over Jerusalem is driven by his love for it. There is no trick we could learn to do that like him. Either it comes naturally, right from the heart, or it is fake.

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Children simply trust, irresistibly hope. Of course they still need to learn how to cope with disillusion, betrayal and raw facts.

Still they show us the way. Just pick up that rucksack, put on your waterproofs for yet another day and get walking. Making one step at a time, they found York and its Viking Museum, Ripon and St Boniface's crypt, Bedale and its centuries old oak tree, Richmond Castle and a free ride on a construction van, Hadrian's Wall and Roman soldiers, Carlisle and its red sandstone cathedral.

Could we look back on our lives and recall where and when it was hope that that kept us in the right track and moving on? When we can, we will learn a profound lesson.

Prophets have come to us to challenge us. And the message they left was that we should look for hope and trust to build our lives on. If we dare to follow Jesus like children, we will find signs of God's kingdom in our world. And that will keep our lives focused on the future God has promised.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Lift up your hearts, believers!' (CH 446)

Offering and Dedication

Prayer of Intercession

Today we pray, God of mercy,
for our own hopes and fears.
The fear that we may fall ill,
that we cannot find a job,
that our children cannot bear the stress of school or work,
that the climate is really changing,
that too many newcomers will damage our communities,
that ever multiplying regulations will make life impossible –
and all those other reasons for being afraid.

God in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God we pray,
that you strengthen our hopes.
Make us trust like children,
make us believe in what we are doing,
make us accept life without despair,
make us look after one another.
We pray for people and countries
that have many reasons to lose hope:
Israel, Palestine, Haiti,
Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea,
Somalia, Darfur, Zimbabwe.
Remember your children, O God,
and make us help wherever we can.
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,
in whose word and deeds we can trust.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Oh, set ye open unto me' (CH 78)

Blessing