

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 14 March 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

4th Sunday of Lent

Mothering Sunday

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'New every morning' (CH 214)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Two little fishes' (CH 504)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

We thank you, O God, for our mothers.

To be a mother

is not the only purpose in life for women,
but we would not have life without mothers.

We thank you for their care and love,
for teaching us how to tie our shoes and wipe our nose,
for bringing us to school and welcoming us back home again,
for cakes and teas and icecreams,
for all these small things that help us to find our way
in the big world and in our own community.

God in your mercy,

HEAR OUR PRAYER.

And we pray

for mothers who were unable to care for their children,
for those who could not become a mother,
for mothers who had too much to worry about.

We pray for mothers today
that they may love and be loved,
care and be cared for,
teach their children and learn from them.

God in your mercy,

HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Lord, teach us to pray:

Our Father,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

[according to Luke 11:2-4]

The daily bread we need
give it to us each day.
Release us from our wrongdoing,
as we also release those who wrong us.
And do not bring us into a trial.
Amen.

Readings : 1 Kings 17:8-16 & John 6:5-15 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

Hymn : 'Father, hear the prayer we offer' (CH 255)

Sermon

Jesus was clearly a woman. We have just heard evidence: he fed a crowd at a moment's notice when there was virtually no food. Of course there is more proof of Jesus being a woman: he kept trying to get a message across to a bunch of men who just didn't get it.¹

Today is Mothering Sunday. I had to look it up, but now I know that this is not the same as Mother's Day. Mother's Day is something invented by American shop keepers a century ago, but the tradition of Mothering Sunday goes back to the Middle Ages at least. Originally it was the day when everyone, without exception, got a day off from work to worship in their mother church, the church where they were baptized. That enabled them, and especially the young apprentices and servants, to visit their family. Traditionally they would bring flowers or bakings for their mother. Clearly that was helpful, because all mothers would need a lot of baking and cooking for their whole families.² (So, no day off with a cup of tea at their bedside...)

Apart from going to church together, having a meal and meeting with the whole family was a privilege for many. Only once a year, on Mothering Sunday, that was possible.

Times have changed. Our children don't leave home for serving or apprenticeships when they are just 10 years old. It is much easier to travel to our parents' home and we have many more ways of staying in touch. Our families also have different dynamics and structures. Still we celebrate Mothering Sunday today.

—

Meals are central in any family, or community. Over the last few decades they have grown considerably in size and price. My parents would never eat out, unless there was some very special occasion. Basically twice in a decade. Having chips in Bruges during a holiday was a kind of extravaganza for six Grashoff children.

¹ And additionally: even when he was dead, he had to get up because there was still work to do. But he may have been Irish too, because he never got married, he was always telling stories and he loved green pastures. Or probably black since he called everyone brother, he liked gospel and he didn't get a fair trial.

² The unsurpassed BBC website has a page about Mothering Sunday, while Wikipedia tells us all about Mother's Day. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/motheringsunday_1.shtml and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mothering_Sunday.

But I think, we still remember that a decent meal can consist of bread, butter, cheese and a cup of tea (I'd rather have milk). Bread still is the basic food, and even McDonald's know that. In good old time prisons – I've been told – bread, water and a vegetable stew were enough to avoid malnutrition. When the RAF and the USAF dropped 11,000 tons of food on Holland in 1945, the one thing people still remember was the bread (even though it was actually wheat).

Buying your own wheat, oil and yeast; kneading the dough and letting it rise; baking your own fresh bread with the smell filling your house – that is a good way to feel connected to this earth on which and through which we live. St Francis had a very good reason to sing the praise of Mother Earth.

Yet, as the Bible says, *one does not live by bread alone*.³ Over meal we share our stories from that day. We argue, we ask, we answer. Meals consumed in total silence are not the best ones-- except if it happens in a special setting like an abbey. And while we eat and chat we gradually learn the values that are important in life. They come wrapped in our daily bread. Not only are we fed, but also nourished. Body, mind and soul all need it.

That is why in the language of the Bible 'bread' is not only the food we chew on. It also refers to the nourishment of our minds and souls. In the Bible 'bread' also refers to the Word of God. Therefore the full Bible quote is: *one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*.⁴

–

Bread is baked. And sometimes you have to scrape your jugs and jars to have just enough ingredients. Sometimes you really need to trust that you can make ends meet and buy enough food. There certainly is some miracle in having your meal every day. But I do not know a better symbol of unity than a freshly baked whole bread on a table.

Then bread is broken and shared. If done properly everyone receives a fair portion. Especially when there is not too much too break, sharing becomes very important. It is an exercise in trust and fairness, for those who give and for those who receive. 'Have you had enough?' is a beautiful question, actually. Because it highlights the facts that we shared food properly.

In a similar way Word from God is formed. Sometimes we really have to scrape in the corners of our hearts and minds to find enough faith to do so. Who are we to talk and act on behalf of God? Still we do. Despite all our shortcomings, and even our wickedness, we do manage to communicate something about God.

Like bread the Word from God needs to be broken in order to share it. That means: the

³ Deuteronomy 8:3 (*New Revised Standard Version*).

⁴ Deuteronomy 8:3 (*New Revised Standard Version*).

stories need to be told in a way children can understand it; the commandments need to be interpreted in a way that they can work within our particular context; the challenging words of prophets and apostles need to be brought back to the level of daily life; and last but not least, the life of Jesus needs to be made into an example we can follow.

If you are at the receiving end, you cannot simply take any Word of God for granted. Just as with bread you need to chew it properly. Which means: you have to question it, to listen carefully and to find your own answers. Eating bread, whether it is home-baked or God-given, is an active process.

–

Mothering Sunday can help us celebrate the blessings of common life, daily food and especially the life-giving extras that come with it. Protestant tradition brought the Bible back on the table in people's homes. Saying grace and reading the Bible A-Z were good orthodox traditions at meal times. Of course times have changed and so have our customs. But still we should remember how we live by bread, but not by bread alone.

How do we know that Jesus was a Jew? He was sure his mother was a virgin and his mother was sure he was a god. Well, that's a joke of course. Mothering Sunday would miss the point if we transform mothers into saints and children into angels.

But to know where we come from, biologically, historically and spiritually, is very important. Our mothers, our mother churches, our motherlands – they have fed us and given us the life we have. We should remember.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Sing of Andrew' (CH 339)

Offering and Dedication

Prayer of Intercession

Today we pray for women,
with or without children,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Today we pray for children,
with or without a mother,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Today we pray for mothers
who lost a child, to life or to death,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Today we pray for foster parents,
for orphanages, for carers,
all who try to replace mothers and fathers,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Today we pray for equal rights
for girls, for women, for mothers,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Today we pray that we may honour
the love and care and endurance
of those who gave us life,
and we remember them in silence.

(...)

God, in your mercy,
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Through Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Make me a channel of your peace' (CH 528)

Blessing