

## **MORNING SERVICE**

Sunday 21 March, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent*

*Communion in Killean & Kilchenzie*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

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

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### **Welcome & Intimations**

**Opening Hymn** : 'You are called to tell the story' (CH 680)

**Children's Talk** [*not in Killean & Kilchenzie*]

**Children's Hymn** : 'Today I awake' (CH 211) [*not in Killean & Kilchenzie*]

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

God we praise and thank you for each day.

For the sun on the hills  
and the glory in the grey;  
for the bread on our table  
and the drink in our cup;  
for our families and friends,  
and all who cross our path.

God in your mercy,  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

But we confess, O God,  
how we can darken the sunlight  
with our ways of being bad;  
how we can feed injustice  
with our refusal to share;  
how we can break community  
with our selfishness and greed.

God in your mercy,  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

*[not in Killean & Kilchenzie:]*

And now as Jesus taught us, we pray:

Our Father...

...Amen.

*(Children leave for Sunday School)*

**Readings** : Isaiah 43:16-21 & John 12:1-8 (*Good News Bible*)

**Hymn** : 'Lift up your hearts' (CH 518)

## Sermon

There is always a lot to complain about. Or to worry. And very often there are good reasons for that.

For example: there are not enough jobs in Kintyre. Actually that is a complaint that can be repeated time and again. It was true when the estates were sold and closed down. And also when the farms got mechanised. And again when the RAF closed down Machrihanish. Every time it made life more difficult for many people, even if those in charge tried to minimise the effects. And young people are leaving to find jobs elsewhere.

Another example: the infrastructure in Kintyre is less than second best. The power grid is faulty, broadband connections are selectively available, roads are in very poor condition. Whether it is because companies cannot make enough profit on their investments, or whether the government is just short of funding, the situation remains unchanged. Living in a beautiful but remote area certainly comes at a price.

But look! All of a sudden Welcon is doing fairly well and needs more people. Tesco is going to build a new and far bigger shop, creating more jobs. And contrary to what one would expect in times of budget cuts, all of a sudden the road north of Tarbert is going to be reconstructed and widened.

Complaining has good reasons. But more important than that is the fact that things may surprisingly change for the better. Often it is more easy to be negative, or even cynical. (I admit to be quite good at that – if you didn't notice yet, ask Nelleke.) To be true, an attitude like that can even be more realistic than always beating the drum of positive thinking. Often it's far easier to find a reason to be negative, than one to be positive.

Today's readings touch on this. Isaiah tells his people, all living in exile and many also in poverty, to watch out for their return to Jerusalem and Judah, which is about to begin. Jesus, on the other hand, tells his disciples to accept the fact that there will always be poor.

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'Isaiah' is the second Isaiah, the one whose voice is heard in chapter 40-55 and who spoke some two hundred years after the prophet who left us the first 39 chapters.<sup>1</sup> The second Isaiah speaks in exile and amidst suffering and despair. Realistically speaking there is no way back to the time that God was worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem. Both city and sacred place had been destroyed.

But Isaiah is a prophet. Apart from having a very realistic view on the world he is living in, he also dares to speak of hope. In fact, hope is the indestructible core of his

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<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to the Book of Isaiah in the pew version of the *Good News Bible*, or more extensively in [Wikipedia](#).

message. And it is a realistic hope. It is realistic because Isaiah rightfully foresaw the turn history was about to take. But probably more important, it was realistic because it revived the people, got them out of their despair and made them ready to return to Jerusalem as soon as the Persian king allowed them. Most likely it was Isaiah's prophecy of hope that made them go to the king and ask him to grant the edict of return.

Now in Israel's history Isaiah's prophecy is not only about the return to Jerusalem granted by king Cyrus in 538 BCE. The Book of Isaiah was very popular in Jesus' time, more than five hundred years later. Why? Because then still that deep and strong hope inspired people to wait for and work on the liberation from Roman occupation. And even after the last revolts against the Romans catastrophically failed, the Jewish people kept hoping for a land of their own. Out of cynicism and despair a new future can, and will, emerge. Things are not what they seem. Behind the despair there is hope. That is how strong prophetic words can be.

As we know many people had to leave the Scottish Highlands during the Clearances. In Kintyre that was apparently not a matter of brute force. Nevertheless it was not out of luxury that people left behind the few things they possessed and the family and friends they could rely on. Quite a few must have been pretty desperate. Yet the majority set off in good spirits and was driven by hope. Letters from America and Canada testify of that. There were definitely hard times and turmoil that people wanted to leave behind, but instead of cynicism or despair they were mostly driven by hope for a better future. And they were willing to work and fight for that. Out of the negativity of Clearances a fresh and new society was born in what people called the New World.

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Jesus is a guest at a most happy meal. Lazarus is there, who had returned to life. But again, things are not what they seem.<sup>2</sup> Behind the joy there is sadness, and Mary expresses it. She pours out nard on Jesus' feet, a liquid used for preparing the deceased. Clearly Mary knows that the joy about Lazarus being revived is only temporarily, and that Jesus will soon die.

Judas talks about caring for the poor, but actually steals the money. (By the way, the fact that the disciples held a 'money bag', indicates that they were not really poor themselves.) If we were in a bad mood, we could think Judas was like some bankers or MPs can be today.

Jesus' answer is strange. It looks as if he is not interested in the poor. That is not the picture we have of him. Jesus' hands were kind hands, isn't it? It is not directly clear what he means.

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<sup>2</sup> The names indicate this. The joyful meal happens in Bethany, 'house of misery'. Lazarus means 'God has helped' and Jesus means 'the LORD is salvation', but who is going to save Jesus from a death on the cross? Judas means 'praise the LORD', but in view of his treachery it almost sounds like 'praise the LORD and pass the ammunition'.

I think Jesus warns his disciples – and us – that there will always be poverty. We should not give poor people false hope. The revolution is not going to happen and those who have too much, will not share it sufficiently. But Jesus doesn't say this to make us sit down and do nothing. On the contrary! Because the poor will always be there, we really need to do justice as good as we can. We will need to talk to our bankers and MPs.

But where to find the hope that our efforts to fight poverty are not in vain, even if we know we cannot solve the problem? That is what Mary has found: the source of hope. She acknowledges that Jesus will soon die, *but...* her anointing fills all of the house with a beautiful, sweet smell. Jesus will die, *but...* Mary doesn't know yet, but she has found a hope that can beat death. Things are not as plain and simple as they seem.

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That is how God works. When we look into a dark cloud, God is probably already there.

Poverty is a shame on our society, because it deprives people of their humanity and dignity. There should not be poverty at all. Yet, realistically speaking we know better. It will always be there. But is that the last word we can say about it? Absolutely not! There is hope, and that must make us work.

Happiness is part of our lives. We should be very careful to celebrate it every time it is there. That is what makes life worth. But is it all there is? We know better, but again, there is hope. Hope that true, deep happiness is at least one purpose of life.

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There is a lot in life to complain about, and rightly so. But once we have learned that things are not necessarily what they seem, because hope is pushing life forward, we might learn to see the other side.

We can complain about a growing lack of community. Instead we could also train ourselves to see the lots of good things happening. Especially among young people.

We can complain that hardly anyone is interested in church or religion. Instead we could see where people really are. This week I had a meeting with a web-hosting manager. He said he had no interest in religion. But he was raised as a catholic and whenever something important happened in the family, Father Jo would come over from Ireland. And the non-religious IT manager clearly valued this very highly.

*Look!*, says God, *I will do a new thing*. It is up to us to find out what new things already are happening.

Amen.

**Hymn** : 'Lord of all being' (CH 125)

**Offering and Dedication**

**Prayer of Intercession**

God of mercy,  
we pray for children who have been abused  
by those who vowed to live your Gospel;  
we pray for families that are devastated  
by things that happened in the past;  
we remember the damage that can never be un-done.  
And we pray for those who did it,  
denying their vocation as your servants,  
ruining childrens' lives  
and deforming themselves.  
It happened in Ireland, in Germany, in The Netherlands,  
but probably in any other country too.  
We pray that confession will be done  
and action will be taken wherever needed.  
More than that, we pray for healing,  
even if that can only be partial;  
we pray for reconciliation,  
even if that will take a long time;  
and we pray for your church, O Lord,  
wherever it is,  
regardless how good or bad –  
that it may learn to live your love.

We also pray, O God,  
for all who miss their mother,  
regardless their age.  
May you be close to us, God our Mother,  
may you be our healing Father.

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

So we pray,  
through Jesus Christ  
who went the way of suffering,  
but never lost your love, O God.  
Amen.

*[only in Killean & Kilchenzie:]*

**Communion Hymn** : 'Ye gates, lift up your heads on high' (CH 19)

**Invitation**

**Narrative**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Prayer of Consecration**

**Communion**

**Prayer after Communion**

*[in Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie:]*

**Closing Hymn** : 'Be thou my vision' (CH 465)

**Blessing**