

## **MORNING SERVICE**

Sunday 4 April 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

*EASTER*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

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

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### **Welcome & Intimations**

**Opening Hymn** : 'Jesus Christ is risen today' (CH 410)

### **Children's Talk**

**Children's Hymn** : 'This is the day' (CH 194)

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

<sup>1</sup>Eternal God,  
this is the day you have made,  
the day on which  
you have glorified your son.  
Blessed are you for him,  
for he gives us new hope  
for our life today and our future.  
Blessed are you for this day  
on which your creation  
can breathe freely again,  
and the people know  
that your love for us  
is stronger than death  
and will last beyond this joyful day –  
it will last for life.

<sup>2</sup>Glory be to you, Eternal God,  
our strength and our redeemer.  
The vacant cross and the empty tomb  
vindicate your claim  
that the love which holds on  
is the love which saves.  
So fill your people with joy  
and your Church with celebration  
that the world may know  
that your holy son,  
our brother Jesus,

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<sup>1</sup> *Dienstboek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1998) p359, translated from the Dutch & adapted.

<sup>2</sup> *Common Order 1994* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2005, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) p440, adapted.

is not a dead hero we commemorate  
but the living Lord in our midst.

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

*(Children leave for Sunday School)*

**Readings** : Isaiah 65:17-25 & Luke 24:1-12 (*Good News Bible*)

**Hymn** : 'Christ is alive!' (CH 416)

### **Sermon**

CHRIST IS ALIVE! That is basically the *only* message the Church has. And for that reason Easter is the very heart of *all* our worship. On Easter day all Christians sing – or at least they should. BUT ... ..

Actually... we make a much larger effort for Christmas, which really is half a pagan festival. Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra or Elvis Presley would not have thought one split second about recording a song called 'I'll be home for Easter'. In the free competition of religious festivals Christmas is number one at great length. No real competition, really.

But! Easter *is* the most important event in the Church. No discussion. *Without* Easter there would not be any church at all. So what does Easter mean to us? What does it mean to me? And how does it relate to our lives here down on earth?

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To me Easter in the first place is a renewal of life. In a tangible and direct way: it is spring! Young animals frolicking in the fields, flowers pushing in the garden, golden gorze on the hills, longer days, more sun. It is a natural event which automatically returns every year, but it feels like magic – automagic.

In the biblical feast of Passover that is certainly included: it is a spring festival, scheduled around the first full moon in the spring. Before we get to anything deeper or more meaningful – some might say: less shallow – we should acknowledge this. Easter is also about eggs and bunnies and daffodils. Because, all in all, it truly is a miracle that life is able to renew itself every year again, and we should thank God for this gift.

So for me it is already Easter when the birds start to sing and build nests. Is that shallow? Is that airy-fairy? If it's all, yes, then it would be a bit thin for 'the meaning of Easter'. But there is no harm in birds reminding you of Easter coming up. (And, of course, we *are* vegetarians and we do *not* keep cats.)

But, minister, what then is the *deeper* meaning of Easter? Admittedly there was a time when this single question would get a single answer. 'This is what Easter means [colon] [quote] [full stop]'. I believe we are beyond that.

As we sit here this morning Easter will have different meanings for us. Depending on what questions are most fundamental in our own life, we will have different understandings of the meaning of Easter. Our answer can even be a big question mark.

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If our main concern is with all the things we continue to do wrong, against each other and against God, then the message of Easter will be one of redemption. Then 'Christ is alive!' will mean that we are free from all sin, free to be the newborn people of God. And isn't that a great message? All our gloominess about a fallen world and people being born sinners is washed away on this bright morning when we sing 'Christ is alive!'

If our main concern is about the death and destruction that wastes millions of lives all around the world, then the message of Easter will be that Life – with a capital 'L' – will overcome all of it. Then the risen and living Christ will be our indestructible symbol of life which is stronger than death and we can leave behind our depressing thoughts about death. That is a very strong message. In spite of death being everywhere it is life that will prevail.

If our main concern is about God's justice and peace, then the message of Easter will be that the justice and peace proclaimed by Jesus is very much alive today. The Gospel will transform all the earth and its inhabitants into a new creation. It is not us who have to achieve that, because God will make all things well. That turns Easter into a main engine of hope and faith and love.

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But perhaps Easter is merely puzzling us. An empty tomb? Jesus being risen from the dead? Christ alive today? To a modernist cynical mind that's all rubbish. Even if we are not cynical, it still is something that can get to us. Everything about Easter seems to be so much against any fact we know, that we simply cannot believe it.

Honestly, that is a very respectable opinion, clearly documented in the Gospel. At the sight of the empty grave women and men equally are frightened, first of all, and especially the men refuse to believe. The Gospel according to Mark originally ended with this puzzling line: *They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.*<sup>3</sup> No proclamation of Christ, no joy whatsoever – a very peculiar Easter, we would say. Yet,

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:8. Scholars agree that Mark 16:9-20, the so-called 'longer ending', is a later addition. Some very old manuscripts have a 'short ending' instead of this.

it is in the Bible.

However, discussions whether or not Jesus 'really' walked out of the grave, are all but helpful. Because they miss the point by just one inch – or centimeter, if you prefer continental measuring – because they only touch on what we usually call facts. When Nelleke and I met, a couple of years ago, we tried to write down why and how much we loved each other. That was very touching, and pretty useless. Because you cannot pinpoint love. It comes with facts – social bonds, emotional expressions, physical exercise – but it really reaches beyond that. If you cannot see that, you might as well take actions in a brothel for love. And that surely is about everything but love.

If Easter is a big question mark for us, we should not feel guilty about it, nor force ourselves to believe. At some point we will learn to look beyond the so-called facts of life. Most likely that will only happen in short moments. We see, sometimes, in a flash. Well, Abram did not have much more than only a few moments in which he knew for certain that God's promise would come true. But once such a moment appears, it really is Easter for us, regardless the date in the year.

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Easter is the greatest show on earth. It reaches from joy about new life in springtime up to the mystical experience of Christ being present. Our Celtic ancestors, who founded the churches in Western Europe, already knew that. They praised the beauty of nature around them and they worshiped the living Christ among them. Our experience and understanding of Easter may span the same width. From bunnies to amazing grace.

So I wish each and everyone a happy Easter. Whether it is just a beautiful sunny day or a much deeper religious experience, may this Easter restore and redeem your life for the year to come.

Amen.

**Hymn** : 'Christ is our light' (CH 336)

### **Offering and Dedication**

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

O God, we praise and thank you  
for the mystery of Easter.  
In faith we accept,  
but our minds are dazzled.  
We pray for those who cannot believe,  
or who dare not rely upon  
the unsettling truth  
that Christ is alive amongst us.  
O God of eternal life,

YOURS IS THE GLORY.

O God, we praise and thank you  
for all signs of new life around us,  
animals, flowers, children.  
We thank you for every life  
that is saved  
in hospitals, out on the streets,  
in situations of war or disaster.  
O God of eternal life,  
YOURS IS THE GLORY.

O God, we praise and thank you  
for moments of forgiveness,  
for days of pure mercy.  
And we remember in prayer  
just and unjust,  
abusers and abused,  
their anger and hurt,  
and their need for mercy.  
Grant them your mercy, Lord of Life,  
and renew their lives.  
O God of eternal life,  
YOURS IS THE GLORY.

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

So we pray  
to God who loves us even beyond death,  
in the name of Jesus, the firstborn of creation,  
and with the holy Spirit of new life within us.  
Amen.

*(Children come back into church)*

**Closing Hymn** : 'Thine be the glory' (CH 419)

**Blessing**