

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 11 April 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

1st Sunday after Easter (Quasi modogeniti)

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

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

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : 'Now the green blade riseth' (CH 417)

Children's Talk

Children's Hymn : 'Lord I pray' (CH 541)

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Thanks be to God
for all the light in our world.
The Light of Easter *is* with us!
We can see it in the sunshine,
especially after rain;
we can see it in the joy of children,
in the smile of old people,
in the satisfaction of an engineer
who successfully devised a machine to help others.
Your light, O God of life,
shines on us through others,
and we make it shine on our neighbours.
We thank and praise you, O God.

And we remember in prayer
the places where your light is dimmed:
Iraq where terrorism killed hundreds this week,
Brazil where hundred people died in a mud-slide,
China where miners were trapped deep down,
and the Scottish houses and streets
where people became victim of violence.
May your light of the new day
reach all people, one day.

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

(Children leave for Sunday School)

Readings : Genesis 28:10-16 & Luke 24:28-35 (*Good News Bible*)

Hymn : 'O God of Bethel' (CH 268)

Sermon

What does the world look like the Sunday after Easter? Has much changed? Or is it a kind of anticlimax? Jacob, fleeing the Holy Land, and the two men at Emmaus, walking away from the Holy City. Easter becomes reality only after we leave the sacred moments behind and face the everyday nitty gritty.

The story of Jacob at Bethel, having this vision of a stairway to heaven, was used in my first parish. During the Reformation the Calvinists had taken over the medieval church. The Catholics always regretted that. Once Catholic religion was allowed again, in the second half of the 19th century, they build their own church right across the old medieval church they could not get back. Both church entrances faced each other. And the Catholics made a beautiful picture with angels above their entrance: two big angels and the words '*this is the gate of heaven*'.¹ Just to make sure that nobody would think that the opposite door would lead to anything holy. I thought it was a humoristic approach of religious differences.

–

But the Sunday after Easter we might wonder wherever *we* are going to find anything like a gate of heaven. If we are old enough, but not too old, we will remember Led Zeppelin singing about a stairway to heaven – and perhaps that song really is.² But let us listen to Jacob's story.

Jacob is running away from his angry brother, running out of the Holy Land. He is a refugee with a very gloomy future before him. All the facts of life are against him. Jacob is as far from heaven as one might think. So he lays down at *some place* – we don't really know where – and he tries to get some sleep to forget about it all.

Right there and then he has this dream. He is told that God will go with him, that he will return to his Promised Land, that he will have many children. It all happens in a dream. Yet, when he wakes up, Jacob is sure: this was God speaking to him. The dream is no illusion, but truth.

On the run, when the odds are against him, Jacob has a dream. Nothing more substantial than just a dream. But in real life this vision kept him going for the donkey's years to come before he can finally return to Israel. A dream, nothing more, but yet nothing could beat it.

–

¹ *Hic est domus Dei et porta caeli* – a slightly adapted quote from Genesis 28:17b.

² Led Zeppelin, 'Stairway To Heaven', from *Led Zeppelin IV* (1971).

Two men were walking to Emmaus. Again a place we cannot locate with any certainty. It is not really important where they are going to, as long as we remember that they walk away from Jerusalem, the Holy City that had seen such unholy events.

To them the facts seem clear. As far as Jesus is concerned, all things have ended. He is dead and gone. End of story.

Two things happen that break through the harshness of the obvious facts. A man breaks the bread with them, after he has been teaching them the words of the Scriptures. Bread and a Word. So common that the two men almost did not notice what it really was.

But all of a sudden they see. Not because of visible signs on Jesus' hands (the text doesn't say anything about that), but because they remember Jesus' teaching and how he broke the bread with them. Now *that* is their Easter moment: whenever they hear and do the words of Jesus, whenever they build communion by breaking the bread, Jesus will be alive and present.

—

Our Catholic brothers and sisters had some sense of humour to label their church door 'the gate of heaven' – as opposed to the Calvinist church door across the street. The truth is, of course, that gates of heaven simply cannot be pinpointed on any map. They reveal themselves when the time is right and the people are ready. It *could* be a church door, but just as well a place up in the Kintyre hills, or a backyard in Glasgow.

If we want to stay close to the faith of Easter morning, the faith that life is stronger than death and we are forgiven people, then we should dare to dream like Jacob, and learn and share like the two men in Emmaus. Of course Bethel and Emmaus are not geographical locations on the map of Israel or Palestine. Both places can possibly be found in Kintyre.

Many centuries ago Irish monks came to Scotland, leaving behind their beloved Ireland. Their Celtic faith was very much aware that God could be found everywhere, and that Christ was walking with them. The monks preached the Gospel and build communities. They were our ancestors, we should follow their example.

Whenever we listen and learn, whenever we share and heal, we run the chance that a wee gate opens itself to heaven. Don't try to hold on to it. It will disappear like Jacob's dream in the morning, like Jesus that evening in Emmaus. Instead *remember* that this gate was there. That is how we find Easter, after Easter Sunday.

Amen.

Hymn : 'Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts' (CH 662)

Offering and Dedication

Prayer of Intercession

We pray, O God of Life,
for all those who are on the road:
farmers and fishermen,
lorrie drivers and ambulance crews,
traders, sailors and pilots.
May their ways be safe and bring them home again,
and may they, on their way, also find your light.
We pray, O God of Easter,
for your light to come and shine in this world,
so that wickedness is exposed and dealt with.
We pray for light on our choice
in the elections to come.
May we not lose hope but use our vote
for the good of the people in Argyll,
for the future of our country,
for justice to the poor and
for peace on earth.

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

So we pray
through Jesus Christ,
our Light and our Life.
Amen.

Closing Hymn : 'Lord of all hopefulness' (CH 166)

Blessing