

## **MORNING SERVICE**

Sunday 25 April 2010, Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie

*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter (Jubilate Deo)*

*preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff*

*hymns: Church Hymnary. Fourth Edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005) / Songs of God's People (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)*

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### **Welcome & Intimations**

**Opening Hymn** : 'Jesus calls us here to meet him' (CH 510)

### **Children's Talk**

**Children's Hymn** : 'The peace of the earth' (CH 798)

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

We praise you, O God,  
for ewes and lambs and rams,  
for cows and calves and bulls,  
for hens and chickens and roosters,  
for life itself in all its abundancy.  
All of life is time-bound, we know.  
But every year again new life appears.  
In it we praise you  
for the signs of unbound life,  
the life you have in mind  
when you create this earth,  
as you did, do and will do.  
We praise you, O God,  
for the age-during life  
you have given us in Jesus.  
God in your mercy  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

And we pray, O God,  
for the times that we damage or destroy  
the life that you gave us.  
From car accidents to natural disasters,  
from street fighting to genocide  
we damage and endanger the life of many.  
Therefore we pray.  
God in your mercy  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

And now as Jesus taught us, we pray:  
Our Father...  
...Amen.  
(Children leave for Sunday School)

**Readings** : Numbers 27:12-23 & John 10:22-30 (*English Standard Version*)

**Hymn** : 'Lead us, O Father, in the paths of peace' (SoGP 62)

### **Sermon**

*These sheep of mine*, Jesus says. Stewart told me a story about sheep. On Mull they had two sheep farms on both sides of one mountain. All through the season all sheep would be out and about all over that hill. Then, when both flocks needed to be separated at the end of the season, the shepherd simply sent their dogs over the high ridge. Every sheep would automatically know which side to go down towards its own farm. The unorganised group of sheep would be neatly divided into the two original flocks – of course with all the lambs added.

A couple of years ago I was asked to lead the Iona Community members on a pilgrimage to Camas, the youth centre on Mull, some 4 miles away from the Iona ferry. All 90 members neatly followed me. However, on the way back I turned left, but 80 just turned right, totally neglecting my leadership. But of course they already knew which way to go for the ferry back to Iona, and they were not interested in my wee detour.

Even if we seem to wander around like sheep without a shepherd, we do know where we belong. We know our way in Kintyre and beyond. We know our way through life. It's just that from time to time wandering can be so exciting...

The question is: do we just wander or do we follow others? If we follow, how and whom? Our times are not particularly geared to follow leaders. We expect more individual choice. Yet, we do need leadership. Locally and nationwide, in church and in politics. So, the real question is: if we need leaders, what kind leaders should that be?

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Joshua is about to take over from Moses. This is a very important moment in Israel's history. The leader who, almost single-handedly made it all possible, is about to depart. What kind of person can be his successor? That's a big question, because the people of Israel are not particularly geared to be led by anyone. They often follow their own stubborn or foolish ways.

Now this is the moment for Joshua. (In Greek his name would be Iesos, or Jesus, and the name means 'the LORD delivers'.) He will take over from Moses and lead the people into the Promised Land. Now what kind of leader is he going to be?

For now, don't think about conquest and war and sacking cities. (Historically it is a big

question anyway whether there has ever been a real conquest of Canaan by former Hebrew slaves.) What happens here is the founding moment and whatever Joshua will do later needs to be measured by this beginning. And of his beginning it is said that he was *a man with Spirit*. That means that he was well aware of the things of God, the ground of all being.

Joshua, a man gifted with the good Spirit of God, will stand before the priest and before the people. He has to listen to whatever God says through the priest, and he has to face the people's stubbornness. Joshua is commissioned, but he will need to endure that the people will not always be committed.<sup>1</sup>

For Joshua to be a leader means: to stand in between God and God's people. (That might feel like Gordon Brown from time to time.) Joshua's leadership is not intended to please the people. It is intended to bring them into the Promised Land and that might require actions with which they are not really pleased. Joshua will be a different kind of leader and he is taking up a tough job.

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Jesus is asked directly if he is the promised leader who would come to liberate the Jewish people from the Roman occupation. Is he the anointed one, the Messiah, God's chosen one?

Jesus does not answer that question. Like his namesake his leadership is different. He is not the one who will do the job for them, but instead he requires the people to follow him. Like sheep who know where they belong, Jesus' followers have to do the works of God: mercy, love, justice, healing.

Jesus is *walking in the temple* when the people ask their question. That is no coincidence. *Walking in the temple* means that he is teaching and learning from the Torah. The true liberation, the real freedom, the *age-during life* is not to be found in armed action against Roman armies, but in daily acts of goodness.

Jesus calls his followers *sheep*. Like the sheep on that hill on Mull, they may seem to be roaming around without plan, but actually they know exactly where they belong and what to do.

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What do we expect from our leaders? Our governments, our bank managers, our employers, our military, our union leaders, our teachers etcetera? Do we expect them to do as we please and simply solve all our problems for us? Do our leader have to comply with our standards of performance, and achieve our targets? Or should we ask for a different leadership?

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<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is based on Rashi's explanation of Num. 27:19: "Concerning the Bnei Yisroel. Know that they are tedious and recalcitrant – [your appointment is] on condition that you accept this".

If we take Joshua and Jesus as our examples, leadership would be different.

In the first place it would be about 'listening to God'. That can very well be an act of personal religious inspiration. Many MPs do pray. But even without religion every human being has a sense of good and evil, of justice and injustice. Leaders, whether religious or not, can very well neglect this side of their job, but if they are wise they do not, but 'listen to God'.

In the second place a different kind of leadership would have the courage to say no. It would make sure that the common good is served before individual wishes are honoured. And different leadership would try to empower, teach and include as many of us, rebellious or obedient citizens, as possible. Good leadership makes people work together.

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Sometimes we just need a dog to chase us to the right side of the mountain.  
Sometimes we need more leadership skills to get us going. What leaders do we need?  
In just 12 days you have got your chance to make your vote heard. (And Nelleke and I get our chance a month later.)

Amen.

**Hymn** : 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' (CH 694)

### **Offering and Dedication**

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

God we pray for our leaders,  
the ones who make plans and laws,  
the ones who fight for their organisation,  
the ones who have a ceremonial role,  
the ones who give us a vision.  
Many people there are,  
and many different leaders.  
God in your mercy  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

We pray, O God,  
for political leaders  
that they may be trustworthy  
and protect everybody's rights and humanity;  
for our queens and kings and presidents,  
that they may be above the parties  
and unite the people;  
for managers and economists,

that they may count more than only money  
and empower their staff to do their best;  
for teachers and health carers  
that they find strength and vision  
to protect and nurture all life.  
God in your mercy  
HEAR OUR PRAYER.

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

So we pray in the name of Jesus,  
in whom we put our trust  
because he is alive among us.  
Amen.

**Closing Hymn** : 'You shall go out with joy' (CH 804)

**Blessing**