

## INDUCTION SERVICE

Saturday 5 December 2009, Taynult

*Induction Robert E. Brookes*

*preacher: Martin Grashoff (Kilcalmonell, Killean & Kilchenzie)*

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### Welcome and Intimations

#### Call to Worship

**Hymn** : 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation' (CH 124)

#### Prayer

**Readings** : Exodus 18:13-18 & Matthew 10:16-20 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

- <sup>13</sup> The next day Moses sat as judge for the people,  
while the people stood around him from morning until evening.
- <sup>14</sup> When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people,  
he said,  
'What is this that you are doing for the people?  
Why do you sit alone,  
while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?'
- <sup>15</sup> Moses said to his father-in-law,  
'Because the people come to me to inquire of God.
- <sup>16</sup> When they have a dispute, they come to me  
and I decide between one person and another,  
and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.'
- <sup>17</sup> Moses' father-in-law said to him,  
'What you are doing is not good.
- <sup>18</sup> You will surely wear yourself out,  
both you and these people with you.  
For the task is too heavy for you;  
you cannot do it alone.'

(...)

- <sup>16</sup> 'See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves;  
so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.
- <sup>17</sup> Beware of them,  
for they will hand you over to councils  
and flog you in their synagogues;
- <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings  
because of me, as a testimony to them and the gentiles.
- <sup>19</sup> When they hand you over,  
do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say;  
for what you are to say will be given to you at that time;
- <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak,  
but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'

**Hymn** : 'My Jesus, my Saviour' (CH 531)

### **Sermon**

Since this is the first time ever I am preaching in Taynult, I thought I'd better choose a reading I will be remembered for. So it was Matthew 10:16 we heard – *I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.*

Now I know next to nothing about Kilchrenan and Dalavich linked with Muckairn. But actually I am pretty sure the wolves rate in this parish will be equal to nil. Nor do I think that Robert Brookes is just a sheep. (If I am wrong, feel free to update me after this service...)

Actually I chose this verse from the Gospel because of what follows: *Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.* Although a more accurate translation for 'wise' would be 'clever' or even 'cunning',<sup>1</sup> these were the words that came to mind first when I was invited to preach at Robert's induction. Being *clever* and *innocent*, that is the question.

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But indeed we are sent out like sheep amongst wolves. That is the situation the church is in. She still may think of herself as being 'established', she may still hold that there are over 2 billion Christians on earth, about a third of the world population, but let's get real. The church in the Western world has preserved less than a shadow of its previous position of power and might. The teeth that can bite are outside the church, and often she has very little defence against it. And because Christian religion had become almost identical with the institution called church, faith itself is at stake.

This is not about having a discussion about evolution or creation. Nor is it about responding to atheism. All that belonged to the cultural phase of modernity, which lays behind us. Today we are moving far beyond that. Our culture is *post*-modern, and some even say that this label is outdated as well. Reality is that all religious expressions we hold dear – our worship, prayer, hymns, rituals, doctrine, ethics – are generally neglected in today's world. For most people religion is not something to dispute, it is simply irrelevant. That is where the wolves bite us. And it hurts.

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To become a minister today is an act of courage and a leap of faith. Very little, if anything, is certain. If we want the church to continue, we will need to almost start from scratch. Parishes should really appreciate and support this and not burden their ministers with impossible wish lists. What once was will not return.

When I was a wee boy, the church was full on Sundays. Mornings and afternoons. I can still remember the feel and the scent of a building filled with people who walked to

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<sup>1</sup> The original text has φρόνιμος ('intelligent', 'understanding'), as opposed to ἄφροντιστος or μωρός ('thoughtless', 'foolish', 'stupid'); and the Greek equivalent of 'wise' is rather σοφός.

church through the rain – no cars or even bicycles were allowed on Sundays. The windows were misted up and it felt like a close family. That same church now is only half full, although the town's population is three or four times as big. Quite a few other churches I attended are no longer in use. And most likely this will be the trend for all churches for the years to come.

Most people left because what happened in church was no longer relevant to their lives. Of course some left slamming the doors. They usually found another church that suited them better, often a more traditional one. But the vast majority left the church not to find any alternative. Initially it will have felt like a kind of liberation. Away from all these rules and bedtime stories. But, as I have learned through my work as a nurse, through my contacts in totally unchurched environments, and also in the three years I worked on Iona, many of those who silently left the church, do feel an emptiness in their lives and they search, in many ways, for spiritual renewal. But the church as it is cannot help them.

It is as in the story Nietzsche tells<sup>2</sup> about the man who walked the market place in full daylight with a lantern. 'What are you looking for?' the people asked. 'I seek God,' he said. 'We have killed God, and that is a disaster.' He was mocked, of course. In our days God is removed from most of the public space, and that is a disaster.

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But, do not worry. As Arthur Murray wrote more than 250 years ago, 'The people of England are never so happy as when you tell them they are ruined'.<sup>3</sup> I think you can say the same of the Scottish people – Murray most likely being a Scot himself. The church has been in even more dire straits before, in ancient history, in the early middle ages, and on the threshold of modern history. Yet it's still there.

There is no master plan to resolve this situation. Step by step we need to find places where God is present. Step by step we need to find what we have to do to be true followers on Jesus. Step by step we need to follow the guidance of the holy Spirit. And most of this will lead us into uncharted territory.

But that is exactly where Jesus sent his disciples: into new lands, no-man's land, wasteland. Matthew 10 is known as the Missionary Discourse.<sup>4</sup> Mission is their first call, and to be a missionary community is today's church's single call. And there is Jesus' advise: *be clever as serpents* – that is: use your common sense and all your skills and understanding of this world – *and be innocent as doves* – that is: do not fret on things you lost or grudge others for their gifts, just go. And of course the strength is in the balance of these two. *Clever and innocent.*

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<sup>2</sup> The parable 'The Madman' in *The Gay Science*, section 145 (1882).

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Murray in *The Upholsterer* (1758), quoted in Jeremy Paxman, *The English* (London: Penguin, 1999) p77. Paxman's granny, by the way, came from Glasgow's Gorbals.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:5-11:1, the second of Matthew's five discourses: Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), Missionary Discourse, Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-53), Instructions to the Church (18:1-19:2) and Eschatological Discourse (24:3-26:2).

Actually, Jesus' advice is quite similar to the advice Jethro gave to Moses. It is a mission impossible for Moses to bear the full load of all these people of Israel, over half a million in the Biblical counting. He needs assistants, seventy of them. Seventy is the Biblical number referring to the number of all nations on earth. With the help of seventy elders – yes, this is exactly why the Reformation invented the new office of the elder – Moses can bring God's word to all people. It is not just about Israel; God sends his Word to all. Likewise for us it is not only about the church, but about at least the whole of our parish. The Word of God needs to go out, everywhere. And that is why we need each other: to be mutual helpers.

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Robert, I hope this sermon is not too presbyterian. (If so, please blame my education.) By taking this step in your life today you certainly show courage and faith. And that in itself is a strong sign of hope. Do not be afraid of wolves. (I believe they are extinct in Scotland, except for the Glenbogle estate.) Do not be afraid of uncharted lands. The Lord sends us. You, me, all of us. And we are not alone. Together we can make a difference.

Rabbi Joshua ben Perachiah says: 'Make yourself a teacher (rabbi) and get yourself a colleague (friend) and judge every person leniently.'<sup>5</sup> Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with our God. That should do.

Amen.

**Hymn** : 'Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided' (CH 159)

**Creed**

**The Narrative**

**Preamble, Ordination and Induction Vows**

**The Signing of the Formula**

**Hymn** : 'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire' (CH 586)

**Ordination, Induction Prayer and the Laying on of Hands**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Declaration of Ordination and Induction**

**The Giving of the Right Hand of Fellowship**

**Questions to the Congregation**

**Charges to the Minister and the Congregation**

**Prayer**

**Hymn** : 'Eternal Father, strong to save' (CH 260)

**Benediction**

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<sup>5</sup> In the Mishnah treatise *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:6.