Lent 3 280216 KINROSS

Last Wednesday I went to Edinburgh on the 8.50 train from Perth. It was timed to arrive at 9.56. It goes across the single track line to Ladybank. 66 minutes is an improvement but it is very slow for rail travel. Remember that. I’ll come back to it.

I went for what we call our Welcome Day for clergy and Lay Readers who are beginning ministry in the SEC. There were 22 of them – some of them part of our growing number of ordinands – there are more of them and they are younger too; others like me have come from elsewhere and as I had to do are learning the story. Lots of energy and hope. The furthest was Stromness – 11 hours to get home.

I shared with them a narrative – the story of our church as I see it at the moment – where we have come from and where we are going; what are our strengths and our challenges. Put God in that narrative and you have a story of faith.

I have lots of ways of getting to Edinburgh. Most often is to take my bus pass to the Kinross Park and Ride and get the Megabus – 50 minutes to the West End of Edinburgh. While I am waiting I think about other narratives.

I often think about the failure of vision which closed the direct railway line between Edinburgh and Perth about 1970. That failure of vision left us with a ridiculously slow single track line to Ladybank or the need to go round by Stirling as I did on the way home.

And as I sit in the Park and Ride, I think about the narrative for Kinross. Sainsbury’s thinks this is a significant place of growth. So do the people who plan and build schools and colleges. So do the people who are building the new housing developments facing the Park and Ride. And so do the people – many of them local landowners – who made the Loch Leven Cycle Path possible.

I think about whether under David’s leadership you – together with us in the diocese - can find a positive and challenging narrative – a narrative of growth and a narrative of hope and possibility.

You may be wondering what the relevance of all this is to the readings today. At the heart of the gospel reading, Jesus is sharing with us a narrative of the human condition and of our relationship with God. He talks about the death of Galileans killed by Pilate – and the sudden death of those on whom the tower fell. ‘Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

I don’t think that Jesus is saying that ‘unless we repent, we shall all suffer a horrible fate’. But I think what he is suggesting is that repentence is a necessary part of the human condition. We should not live as if life was endless – we should take the opportunity of repenting – literally turning around – so that we can become the recipients of God’s grace and mercy.

We all take comfort in settling for a fixed way of seeing things. When I work with clergy in their training and in the early years of ministry, I encourage them to live with a level of provisionality about things – to carry the possibility that they might not know all that there is to know about something, that it is not weakness to change or adjust your view about something. Indeed when we are dealing with things which are to do with God and the life of faith, I can’t see how it can safely be otherwise. For God’s call moves and reshapes the narrative and invites us to explore things in a new way.

Most surprising of all, there is a strange joy in all that – not fear or loss of hope or anxiety. But joy

For grace is experienced within the awful precariousness and strange beauty of our fleeting existence. Grace – which comes from the absolute, unchanging love and mercy of a forgiving God – is what we find when we turn towards God. And sometimes it is we who are found and not God.