

## **St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall**

[www.stmagnus.org](http://www.stmagnus.org)

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation](https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation)



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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

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### **SUNDAY 14<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY**

You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/vceOe-XPqIU>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

[stmagnuszoom@gmail.com](mailto:stmagnuszoom@gmail.com)

Opening meditation

There is mystery at the heart of things and it is alive  
and sings its song  
into all that is moribund and plain.

It is born of a wonder that only increases:

for in exploring  
the wonder grows;  
in understanding a greater puzzle is revealed;  
the more we dive into the riddle we find a yet greater enigma.

Here,  
let us gather round the greatest of all mysteries where faith can only offer  
belief  
and wonder  
and daring adventure  
enough  
to transfigure  
and behold  
the whole universe  
in resurrection truth.

Come,  
let us wander into the mystery of God.

Reading from Micah 6 read by Rosemary Moon

How can I stand up before God  
and show proper respect to the high God?  
Should I bring an armload of offerings  
topped off with yearling calves?  
Would God be impressed with thousands of rams,  
with buckets and barrels of olive oil?

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do,  
what God is looking for in men and women.  
It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour,  
be compassionate and loyal in your love,  
And don't take yourself too seriously—  
take God seriously.  
Attention! God calls out to the city!  
If you know what's good for you, you'll listen.

So listen, all of you!  
This is serious business.

God says... "Do you expect me to overlook obscene wealth  
you've piled up by cheating and fraud?  
Do you think I'll tolerate shady deals  
and shifty scheming?  
I'm tired of the violent rich  
bullying their way with bluffs and lies.  
I'm fed up. Beginning now, you're finished.  
You'll pay for your sins down to your last cent.  
No matter how much you get, it will never be enough—  
hollow stomachs, empty hearts.  
No matter how hard you work, you'll have nothing to show for it—  
bankrupt lives, wasted souls.  
You'll plant grass  
but never get a lawn.  
You'll make jelly  
but never spread it on your bread.  
You'll press apples  
but never drink the cider.  
You have lived by the standards of your king, Omri,  
the decadent lifestyle of the family of Ahab.  
Because you've slavishly followed their fashions,  
I'm forcing you into bankruptcy.  
Your way of life will be laughed at, a tasteless joke.  
Your lives will be derided as futile and fake."

**May we open ourselves to the seeds of wisdom  
that lie dormant in this reading. And may our minds be fertile soil  
in which they may grow strong and true**

#### Reflection

Many, many years ago, between the World wars, the great writer G. K. Chesterton looked at his society and saw some things that disturbed him. Here's his comment in his book, 'The Everlasting Man'.

"There comes an hour in the afternoon when the child is tired of 'pretending'; when he is weary of being a robber or a noble savage. It is then that he torments the cat. There comes a time in the routine of an ordered civilization when a person is tired at playing at mythology and pretending that a tree is a

maiden or that the moon made love to a man. The effect of this staleness is the same everywhere; it is seen in all drug-taking and dram-drinking and every form of the tendency to increase the dose. People seek stranger sins or more startling obscenities as stimulants to their jaded sense. They seek after mad religions for the same reason. They try to stab their nerves to life, if it were with the knives of the priests of Baal. They are walking in their sleep and try to wake themselves up with nightmares.”

Ah, the genius of Chesterton’s writing. Even if one doesn’t fully agree with his assessment, nobody can argue with his expression. That notwithstanding, it doesn’t strain our imaginations to see evidence of what he is expressing inside our own culture today.

There are loads of examples. The illegal drug trade is one of the biggest industries in the world, one in ten of the population of the Seychelles is a heroin addict, excessive use of alcohol is everywhere, high-profile athletes and entertainers brag that they have slept with thousands of people, even as they go in and out of rehab regularly. Celebrities show up at parties carrying briefcases full of cocaine, and drug dealers already find a market among our school students and get youngsters to deliver the goods into rural areas. Evidently many of us today are also trying to stab our nerves to life by constantly increasing the dosage.

But we don’t need to look at the lives of rich and the famous to see this. None of us are immune. We just do this more subtly. Take, for example, our addictive struggle with information technology. It’s not that the internet and the myriad of phones, tablets, gadgets, and games that are linked to it are bad. They aren’t.

In fact we are a very lucky generation to have such instant and constant access to information and to each other. And we are finding this to be ever more the case in this time of lockdown. Ever smarter phones, better internet connections, and things such as Facebook are not the problem. Our problem is in handling them in a non-addictive way, both in how we respond to the pressure to constantly buy ever-newer, faster, flashy, and more capable technologies, and in our inability to not let them control our lives. We too perpetually tire of what we have and seek somehow to increase the dosage to stab our nerves into life.

Whenever that happens there is a danger that we begin to lose control of our lives and find ourselves on a dangerous treadmill upon which we begin to lose any sense of real enjoyment in life.

According to the Belgian psychologist Antoine Vergote, ‘Excess is a substitute for genuine enjoyment.’

We go to excess in things because we can no longer enjoy them simply. It's when we no longer enjoy our food that we overeat; it's when we no longer enjoy a drink that we drink to excess; it's when we no longer enjoy a simple party that we let things get out of hand; it's when we can no longer enjoy a simple game that we need extreme sports, and it's when we no longer simply enjoy the taste of chocolate that we try to eat all the chocolate in the world.

Moreover excess isn't just a substitute for enjoyment; it's also the very thing that drains all enjoyment from our lives. Excess is a substitute for enjoyment and because it doesn't bring genuine enjoyment it pushes us on to further excess, to something more extreme, in the hope that the enjoyment we are seeking will eventually be induced.

Some analysts of human psychology maintain that as a species we are all susceptible to addictive behaviours. We are almost hard wired to it.

Some suggest by way of antidote that focussing on a simpler life can help. But that is easier said than done. We live with constant pressure, from without and from within, to see more, consume more, buy more, and drink in more of life.

The pressure to increase the dosage is constant and unrelenting. But this is precisely where a deliberate, wilful, and committed moderation is demanded of us. We must, at some point say this, mean it, and live it: It's enough. We have enough. We are enough. Life is enough. We need to gratefully enjoy what we have. As Jesus having called the Twelve, he commissioned them to preach the news of God's kingdom. He said, "Don't load yourselves up with equipment. Keep it simple; *you* are the equipment'

#### Prayer

We give thanks for the wonders of our world. For hope, and light, and clarity— vision cleared to see the world as it could be.

We pray for those who are daring to hope;  
May they keep it up, sincerely, assured that their most radical superpower is that fragile spark they feel right now that is nudging them toward a horizon that might at times seem silly, but is still far more worthy of their energy than any despair that keeps trying to overshadow it.

We pray today for those whose vision is not clear: those who cannot or will not see poverty, hunger, sickness, for what they really are: not punishment for foolish behaviour; not the fault of weak and vulnerable people, but rather the result of greed and selfishness.

We pray for justice in our world. We pray that those who are different may be seen and loved for who they are. We pray for those who want to make a difference that they may be empowered. We pray for those who can make a difference that they may be inspired to action.

blessing

The blessings of heaven, the blessings of earth, the blessings of sea and of Sky. On those we love this day and in every human family, the gifts of heaven, the gifts of earth, the gifts of sea and Sky. [Philip Newell]

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit this day and always.