***St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall***

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

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

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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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You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here. stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

We light this candle for all God bearers, saying ‘yes’ to God's challenge, accepting the pain and joy of an unknown future.

A candle burns, the fourth marker of our Advent journey.

As we continue, may we travel joyfully.

As we continue

may we know the God within draws us to our journey’s end

Scattering the proud, Christ look with favour on those the world ignores. We wait for the One who will feed us; we wait for the One

who stands with us in our loneliness and pain. For his Spirit, we wait.

Jesus Christ, born in a backwater town: in him the hunger

of our hearts is filled; in him, we are lifted from our hopelessness;

in him, all the promises come true. For his Spirit, we wait.

Holy Spirit, is the hallower of God's people: from her comes faith, so we might believe; from her comes belief, so we might be blessed;

from her come all blessings, so we might give them away.

For her, we wait.

Reading

Luke 1:39-55

A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's home, where she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby moved within her.
 The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. Then in a loud voice she said to Mary: God has blessed you more than any other woman! God has also blessed the child you will have. Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise.

Mary said:

My soul sings in gratitude.

I’m dancing in the mystery of God.

The light of the Holy One is within me

and I am blessed, so truly blessed.

This goes deeper than human thinking.

I am filled with awe

at Love whose only condition

is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud,

for they have no room for it.

The strong and self-sufficient ones

don’t have this awareness.

But those who know their emptiness

can rejoice in Love’s fullness.

It’s the Love that we are made for,

the reason for our being.

It fills our inmost heart space

and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.

Reflection

We see the preferential bias for the poor clearly revealed here in Mary's Magnificat.

That is not new doctrine, something liberation theology invented. It's very traditional theology.

What does it mean? It means the people on the bottom of the system — any system — are usually much more ready to hear the word of God. Longing and thirsting for righteousness, they are more ready to stop protecting the status quo. Therefore they're much more ready for transformation. They have a head start, a symbolic if not real advantage.

Jesus says directly, later on in Luke 4, '*I've come to preach the gospel to the poor*'. We've found, after fifteen hundred years in the Western church of trying to preach the gospel primarily to kings, princes, the rich and powerful, that the message always seemed to get prostituted. It liberates nobody: the powerful remain in their illusions and preoccupations with security; the poor remain victimized and often bitter.

We are beginning to make an important discovery. When you preach to the prisoners, to the financially poor, the differently abled, to those who are not the beneficiaries of the system — then you get a much purer response to the gospel. It is not as likely to be used and abused for the purposes of control and power. I think that's why we're only now coming to deal with Jesus' words about war and poverty. As long as we continued to preach the gospel to the people on top, it was used by them merely to support their system and worldview. They never got around to dealing with the radical questions of the gospel as round in the Magnificat.

So in the church today we speak of the bias toward the poor. We use the word 'bias' intentionally. When you own your bias, then the cards are on the table. The trouble is that those enjoying the benefits of our out of control capitalist system will seldom admit that they have a bias on the other side. 'I don't have a bias,' middle-class Christians often say. 'I just have the truth.' The rationalization of power, patriarchy and free-market economics is seldom owned, because one can't see one's own shadow side.

What I've learned in rich world Christianity is that this bias toward the rich and powerful is seen as the truth and correct view of the world. The gospel is calling us: 'Can you be transformed to leave your viewpoint, to move away from your vantage point where you are the beneficiary, where you see the gospel supporting your political worldview and economic status quo, and stand in another viewpoint?' Every viewpoint is a view from a point! I'm not saying the preferential option for the poor is the whole truth, but it is an essential truth and a starting point for the gospel Jesus preached.

It's not an exclusive option, but it is a primary, preferred, and necessary one. Without including this preferential option we will read and interpret the gospels incorrectly, so they will support and maintain our bias. We call that 'establishment theology' because it preserve the existing power structure. It maintains things the way the are, which is usually in support of power and control instead of truth and justice.

This current bias seems so self-evident once it's spelled out that it's amazing it has taken us so long to recognize it.

If you've ever worked with poor people, you know that the people on the bottom of any system are quite aware of the establishment bias. Perhaps one of the reasons why women's religious consciousness has developed so much more quickly than men's is because women traditionally have been at the bottom of this system. People on the bottom ask different questions.

Here I am, an ordained white British male, quite comfortable and secure teaching about this establishment bias, yet I am its ultimate beneficiary. We white males control most of this planet and probably have 80 percent of the power and possessions on the earth. White, middle-class males are one of the hardest groups to preach the gospel to. Why would they want to talk about transformation and change? Why would we guys want to change anything? We're enjoying it. We've got everything. Try to talk the gospel to the people at the top. It's next to impossible.

Luke tells us that Jesus tried it several times; with Simon the Pharisees he failed and with Zacchaeus he had some success. Most of the time in this gospel Luke just keeps preaching to the edge — to the poor, the little ones — because they are much more ready to hear the Word of God without distorting it.

Prayer

When it's cold and wet. And we long for the light. Come Christmas. Come to bring warmth and joy to innkeepers and travellers, to shepherds and kings. Come to bring hope and peace to refugees and security forces. Come to comfort the lonely and wipe the tears from the cheek of those who are sad. May Christ's light shine into the dark recesses of our minds and our cities, towns and villages. May his warmth bring forth harvests of joy. May his peace enter the hearts of those who struggle and plot for power and advantage over others. May the Christ child of Bethlehem, the spirit of wonder be born in us and the world once more. That joy may be shared., peace proclaimed and love abound.

Blessing

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