

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

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.

You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/G-9PIYvrGxg>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

Let there be light, let there be understanding, let all the nations gather together face to face leading to peace on earth. Let there be light.

He came singing love, and he lived singing love: he died singing love. He arose in silence. For the song to go on we must make it our song: you and I be the singers.

He came singing hope and he lived singing hope: he died singing hope. He arose in silence.

For the hope to go on

We must make it our song: you and I be the singers.

He came singing peace and he lived singing peace: he died singing peace.
He arose in silence.
For the peace to go on
We must make it our song: you and I be the singers.

Reading

Exodus 2; 1-10

Pharaoh had commanded all those in Egypt, "Let every boy that is born to the Hebrews be thrown into the Nile, but let every girl live." There was a man from the house of Levi who had married a Levite woman, and she conceived and gave birth to a boy. And she saw that the baby was good, so she hid it for three months. When she could hide the baby no longer she took a papyrus basket, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and put the child in it, and placed the basket among the reeds by the banks of the Nile. The baby's sister watched from a distance to learn what would happen. Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile to bathe, while her attendants walked along the river bank. She noticed the basket among the reeds and sent her attendant to fetch it. Opening it, she saw the baby—and how it wept! She was moved to pity and said, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children!" Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Do you want me to go and find a nurse for you among the Hebrews to suckle the child for you?" "Yes, go," she answered. So the sister went off and brought the baby's own mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child with you and suckle it for me, and I myself will pay you." The woman took the child and nursed it. After the child was weaned, she brought it to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted it as her own. She called him Moses—"He Who Pulls Out"—for she said, "I pulled him out of the water."

Reflection

As a way of explaining the intricacies of life on this planet, scientists [for the benefit of lay people like me] suggest we imagine that the world is like a great spider web — minus the spider. Or rather, *including* the spider, as even the tiniest of creatures are card-carrying members of our silky, web-like world. This lacy, cosmic extravagance in which we all find ourselves can be explained with elaborate scientific models, but the spider web is all we really need to stir our imagination.

We could also use the spider web as the perfect image for understanding the spiritual life, built on the idea of a web-like universe where every small gesture of kindness sets the whole world atremble. The silken threads that connect us are awash with possibility after possibility for tremors of love and beauty to ripple across the universe.

In this great web — so delicate and sensitive and made of divine materials — we find our meaning and purpose. Immersed in such a vast belonging, we move about with care, not only for ourselves, but for every filigreed corner of our intricately woven existence. This precious web, both beautiful and treacherous, needs our attention and our nurture. Most of all, it needs small gestures of kindness.

That is why, during a pandemic, we wear face masks in public. The simple act of looping elastic behind our ears and covering our noses and mouths is a small gesture that causes the whole web to tremble in a cascade of mutual influences. With this simple act, we care for the whole web of vulnerable friends and strangers.

But to refuse to wear a mask [other than medical exemption] causes a different kind of tremble in our web-like universe, damaging the silvery, delicate threads that connect us in our web-like home. Such an act of carelessness or callousness tears at the very fabric of life. For the truth is, the Earth is a web, an organism woven together so tightly that we cannot escape into imaginary pods labelled "personal freedom," cut off from the rest of the universe. In the great web of life, our personal freedom is found only in relation to everything else. I will not truly flourish unless I am concerned about your flourishing, too. Humanity will not flourish unless the oceans and forests and bees flourish, too. To deny our organic connection is to cause the web of life to tremble in ways that make the Earth groan and the heavens weep.

The marvellous and terrifying thing about this web is that, as Frederick Beekner [Beuchner] writer and theologian says, "The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt."

That sounds very much like what scientists tell us today about the coronavirus, how it infects us in an elaborate chain reaction that, unbeknownst to us, affects not only those in close proximity, but people we cannot know or see — vulnerable people further down the web of interconnection who may even experience the ultimate trembling of death. This trembling through invisible threads of causation is called the "butterfly effect": the tiny flutter of a butterfly's wing in Brazil might be the beginning of what becomes a tornado in Texas. Or — and we often forget this part — it could also be the very flutter that *prevents* a tornado in Texas.

The power of the small gesture — the mask, the flutter of a smile, the batch of home bakes on a doorstep — sets the web atremble in ways beyond our imagining. The smallest gesture cascades out beyond our personal intentions, which humbles us, even while it fills us with awe. Small is huge in the intricate web of life! Look what happened when Pharaoh's daughter spotted baby Moses in the bullrushes. We should not be thinking in terms of heroic acts, which few are capable of, but rather in tiny tremors of kindness that ripple across the world.

Could it be that the authentic spiritual life is simply made up of small gestures? Perhaps, in the great web of life, it is in these tiny trembles of kindness that the world is lifted out of misery.

Donning a mask in public, then, becomes a form of spiritual etiquette. We greet our masked friends in the silent language of our invisible web: *I care about you and you care about me*. We are not to know of the far-flung results of such a small gesture of kindness, but we live by faith that it makes a difference to the world.

If God cares about the number of hairs on our head and feels the pain of a single falling sparrow, then we can trust in a divine kindness that works from deep stores of empathy and hospitality. The Spirit presence who inhabits the silky threads that connect us, calling out to us in every tremble of pain or joy: *Be kind. Be kind. Be kind.*

Prayer

So often we are a belligerent people, hostile and angry at those who want what we want; aggressive and defensive about what we feel is ours; dangerous and violent when threatened by others and prone to hostile bids to get what our heart really desires be it in our work, our homes or communities.

This is not the humanity the old story tells us was created, in the image of God. the one that was to love one another, care for one another, help one another, be kind to one another.

The kind of people who could demonstrate compassion, express love in acts of service, seek peace by finding a new way for all, discern the Spirit and act on what it shows us needs done.

So, as we walk together on the Way of Christ may we hear it and live out his teachings.

We pray today for those workers who have been exploited and oppressed, for those trapped into slavery, and for the refugee and asylum seeker who is left without a voice.

We pray today for those who are called to manage and lead, that they do so wisely and fairly, and treat all people with dignity and respect.

We pray for those who are victims of all forms of violence, whether it be domestic, political or sexual, and call for justice for all.

We pray for all those who feel they are not listened to, may their voices be heard and answered. We pray for those who feel they have been cheated out of what belongs to them and ask for reparation and fairness.

We pray for those who long to be the best they can be and pray that through them Christ's may will be followed.

Blessing

Let us go to tend and nurture the kingdom. In our homes and workplaces, our places of rest and fun. That we would be witnesses to grace, creativity and forgiveness.

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