

## **3St 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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You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/uyyL01qYZdA>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

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

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

The candle is lit

This is the season of Lent

When we prepare ourselves for the great events of Easter

It is when we look honestly and critically at our lives

We identify where we fail and get things wrong

And we look forward to the gift of a new start, a new life.

In our hearts we follow the way that Jesus took.

there was a time

when we knew

without a doubt

that God was

a white-haired old gent

holding a ruler,  
ready to smack our hands  
whenever we were bad;

there were years  
when we longed for God  
to come storming down  
to shake up society  
and make it more like heaven:  
where everyone is loved,  
no one is shoved aside,  
little children are as valued  
as the wisest and richest,  
where we go swimming  
in that cascading river  
called Justice;

now?

We see God for who  
God has always been:  
Wisdom warning us  
to look both ways  
as we cross sin's streets;  
Compassion whose lap  
always has room for us;  
Love  
who always accepts us  
Grace  
who walks beside us  
every day.

abide in us, Mothering God,  
abide in us.  
As we sit here, the beating of our heart,  
the ebb and flow of our breathing,  
the movements of our mind  
are all signs of God's ongoing creation of us.

#### Reading

#### **1 Corinthians 13 1-8, 12-13**

Even if I can speak in all the tongues of earth—and those of the angels too—but do not have love, I am just a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy such that I can comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge, or if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own to feed those poorer than I, then hand over my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, and it is not snobbish; it is never rude or self-seeking; it is

not prone to anger, nor does it brood over injuries. Love doesn't rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails. Now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror; then we will see face to face. My knowledge is imperfect now; then I will know even as I am known. There are, in the end, three things that last: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

### Reflection

St Paul says in that letter to the fledgling church in Corinth "I may have a wonderfully thought out theology, I might have the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of hidden truth, but if I do not have love and compassion, it all counts for nothing; I am like an empty vessel that makes a hollow sound."

I recently listened to a well known Christian philosopher debating with a leading atheist. The arguments were interesting enough but I came away disappointed. It seemed an academic exercise, having little to do with faith, doing nothing to inspire those seeking a purpose in life, and offering no hope or love to people struggling with the daily realities of life.

One problem of modern Christianity, whether traditional or progressive is that so much attention is given to doctrines or to alternative progressive thinking, that the realities, blessings, consolation and mystery of everyday faith can be lost amidst all the words. I am sure you, like me have come away from some church services feeling somewhat empty.

Although we agree with what is said there, we're left wondering where the passion and compassion, the challenge and commitment have all gone.

Faith is so much more than intellectual assent to ideas. It's a transforming relationship of love and trust; a personal journey of discovery; and so, it's more a spiritual adventure than a state of mind. It's an active response to a vision of "God's" kingdom (however we that phrase); I tend to go with 'the Way of Christ' or the 'Jesus Way' and so it's indeed a way of life.

The writer of the medieval masterpiece "The Cloud of Unknowing" expressed this as, "God can be loved but God cannot be thought. God can be grasped by love but never by concepts. So less thinking and more loving." This should be reflected in the way we talk about faith. We have to give people food for the soul, not just food for the mind.

Lists of beliefs, rituals and worship styles - the things that tend to divide people and take up so much energy in modern Christianity - aren't that important. They are the lid on the box. The truth of a faith isn't in the picture or the label on the lid - in how people describe their faith - but in the contents of the box. It's how people love and live in relation to the divine and to others that really matters.

Yes, we're called to "love God with our mind" as well as with our heart. Our faith has to make intellectual sense to us. Organizations like the Progressive Christianity Network and similar have been invaluable in allowing those who struggle with traditional theology to frame their faith in a way that is meaningful to them. But we have to distinguish between intellectual explorations that properly belong in theological discussions, articles or books, and actually living out our faith.

Jesus told us that at the heart of faith are the two great love commandments. All the rest is commentary. If we focus on aspects of interpretation, we risk losing sight of the centrality of love. If any church (however liberal or traditional) puts more emphasis on doctrine or theological theories than on love, more on words than on spirit, it'll be in danger of losing its soul. The great commission wasn't to "Go and make believers"; it was to "Go and make disciples", followers of Jesus whose lives reflect his and who help to bring the "Kingdom of God" that little bit nearer.

If an Evangelical prison chaplain converts a hardened criminal, who then transforms his life, or a pastor enables a terminally ill patient to face death with hope in her heart, does it matter if we find the atonement theory they've employed unconvincing? Do we discount the self-sacrificial love of a priest working alongside the poor in a Brazilian shanty town, because we struggle with papal pronouncements which seem decades out of date? How do we respond to the aged widow with tears in her eyes lighting a candle to her favourite saint?

John Wesley rejected attempts to define Methodists by their theology: "The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not their opinions of any sort. A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in their heart." This principle surely still applies today. We have to stop judging people by whether their spiritual experiences reflect ours and by the religious language they use, and start valuing them for the way they love and live in relation to God and to others. To paraphrase St Paul: "I may have a wonderfully thought out theology, I might have the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of hidden truth, but if I do not have love and compassion, it all counts for nothing; I am like an empty vessel that makes a hollow sound."

It is only when we make our faith active, when we commit ourselves to compassion and selfless love and to promoting justice, that we can claim to be following the path and teachings of Jesus.

#### Prayer

We gather this Mothers Day grateful for all the women who have been part of our lives, in one way or another.

For their strength and courage, their grace and integrity, their kindness and generosity, their desire to nurture and their ability to take risks.

We are thankful for all the women who stand up for the women who have no voice. For all the women who go the extra mile and carry the weak and broken with them. for all who suffer as a result of war: the injured and the disabled, for the mentally distressed, for the homeless and refugees,

for those who are hungry, and for all those who have lost their livelihood and security . .

We pray for a world that sees women as equal to men, treats women respectfully, and allows women to be who, they were made to be.

So be it. Amen.

#### Blessing

May all persons be mothers, regardless of gender, sexuality, or life choices. We all build capacity to care and nurture. May we be mothers to the earth, trees, to strangers, to ourselves, our friendships. To those like us and unlike us who stop known and unknown.

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