

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/Pe04tUTdzPw>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

We light this candle, symbol of the Light within us and around us.

May this gathering for worship

enlighten our hearts and our minds and our souls.

And may the Inner Light of the Spirit be kindled by our time together

This is the place of gathering. We gather to celebrate God's love. This is place of praise-bringing. We praise God for gifts wonderful and gracious. This is the place of listening. We listen for God's life-giving Word to inspire and lead us. This is the place for building faith community. Joined in community, we can work for God's justice and bring God's peace.

Reading John 15; 1-10

Jesus said to his disciples...

"I am the true vine, and my Abba is the vine grower who cuts off every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, but prunes the fruitful ones to increase their yield. You've been pruned already, thanks to the word that I have spoken to you. Live on in me, as I do in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, neither can you bear fruit apart from me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who live in me and I in them will bear abundant fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If you live on in me, and my words live on in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Abba will be glorified if you bear much fruit and thus prove to be my disciples. As my Abba has loved me, so have I loved you.
Live on in my love. And you will live on in my love if you keep my commandments."

Reflection

Our image of God creates us. This is why it is so important that we see God as loving and benevolent and why good theology is still important. Good theology has two important tasks: to keep all people free for God and to keep God free for all people. Sadly many churches do not allow God much freedom. God is always so much bigger than the theological and churchy boxes we build for "him." Without recognizing it, many people have an operative image of God as Santa Claus. He's "making a list and checking it twice, gonna find out who's naughty or nice." He rewards the good kids with toys (heaven) and punishes the bad kids with lumps of coal (hell). If we don't have a mature spirituality or an honest inner prayer life, we'll end up with a Santa Claus god, and the Gospel becomes a cheap novel of reward and punishment. That's not the great Good News! An infinitely loving God is capable of so much more than such a simplistic trade off or buy out.

Bringing social acceptability to Christianity has not helped in this regard. After Constantine made Christianity the established religion of the Roman Empire in 313, the great biblical concepts of grace and forgiveness gradually were controlled by formulas and technique. Empires cannot afford too much mercy or forgiveness. Soon the Church created equations: this much sin results in this many years in purgatory or hell; this much penance results in this much time released from purgatory. Grace and forgiveness became juridical and distant concepts instead of deep spiritual realizations. Disobedience or disloyalty were seen as much more sinful than any failure to love or serve or show mercy. And when forgiveness becomes a weighing and judging process, then we who are in charge can measure it, define who is in and who is out, find ways to earn it, and exclude the unworthy.

Much of Christian history has gone on to manifest a very different god than the one Jesus revealed and represented. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, but this "cultural" god sure doesn't. Jesus tells us to forgive "seventy times seven" times, but this god doesn't. Instead, this god burns people for all eternity. Many of us were raised to believe this, but we usually had to repress this bad theology into our unconscious because it's literally unthinkable. Most humans are more loving and forgiving than such a god. We've developed an unworkable and toxic image of God that a healthy person would never trust. The mystical, transformative journey cannot take place until that image is undone. Why would you want to spend even an hour in silence, solitude, or intimacy with such a god?

Another mistaken but favourite image of God that keeps us from receiving grace is the idea that God is a cruel tyrant. People who have been raised in an atmosphere of threats of punishment and promises of reward are programmed to operate with this cheap image of God. Many experienced this foundational frame for reality as children, and it is hard to let go. It gives a kind of sick coherence to their world.

Unfortunately, it's much easier to organize people around fear and hatred than around love. Most people who want to hold onto power view God as vindictive and punitive. Powerful people actually prefer this worldview, because it validates their use of intimidation. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have used the threat of eternal hellfire to form Christians. I am often struck by the irrational anger of many people when they hear that someone does not believe in hell. Threat of hellfire "works" because it appeals to the lowest level of consciousness, where we all start.

As today's reading from John's gospel shows, Jesus talks about oneness. He's meaning no separation between God and humans. What he has in mind is a complete mutual indwelling. I am in God. God is in you. You are in God. We are in each other. He says. 'I am the vine. You are the branches abiding me as I in you.' He goes on to say, as Abba has loved me, so I have loved you, abide in my love.'

The 9/11 Memorial at the site of the Twin Towers in New York City has huge waterfall which drops down into the darkness of a lower pool whose bottom you cannot see. It can be viewed deeply as a metaphor for God: love eternally pouring into darkness, always filling an empty space. Grace fills all the gaps of the universe.

Prayer

We pray through Christ our light. For the world. Shrouded in a cloud of famine, war and pollution. Tinted and deformed by grim deceit.
Spirit; Bring Healing Bring Peace

We pray for ourselves. For clarity about the future. For sensitivity in our relationships. For courage to face tomorrow. As we explore on the plain, the implications of the mountain top.
Spirit; Bring Healing Bring Peace

May the Holy Spirit of truth and her devouring fire of love inspire us to declare the truth openly. Burn for God without being consumed. Be prepared to move and be moved. Be witnesses for Christ's glory until the day dawns and the Morning, Star rises in our hearts.
Spirit; Bring Healing Bring Peace

Blessing

Follow the Good Shepherd Into ways of truth and justice.
Listen to the Good Shepherd For wise words that can be trusted.
Believe in the Good Shepherd For a faith that cannot be shaken.
Be challenged by the Good Shepherd To change our friends and our community with love.

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

