

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/aBJ7WmXyG9g>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

Let there be light.

Wherever darkness is to be put to flight,

"Let there be light

Sacred space, holding all silence;
silence, holding the whole word of God;
word of God, holding all truth for the world;
truth for the world, holding every hope of life;
hope of living, holding every grace of God;

the grace of God, holding every moment of heaven;
moments of heaven, held in sacred space;
sacred space, holding all silence;
in this silence, we meet the Spirit of God. Amen.

Reading 1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a

Some time afterward, there was an episode concerning a vineyard that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. {JEZ-RAY-EL-ITE] The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the royal residence of Ahab, ruler of Samaria. Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for my vegetable garden, since it is close to my royal residence. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay for the vineyard." But Naboth replied, "God forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors!" So Ahab, sullen and angry, went home because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He went to bed sulking, refusing to eat. His wife Jezebel came into the bedroom and asked, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" Ahab replied, "I met with Naboth the Jezreelite and said, "Sell me your vineyard, or, if you prefer, I'll give you another vineyard in exchange." He refused, saying, "I will not turn my vineyard over to you." Jezebel said, "Is this how you carry on as ruler of Israel? Get up and eat! Stop your moping! I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, using his seal, and sent them to the elders and officials who lived in Naboth's city. She wrote in those letters, "Proclaim a day of fasting, and seat Naboth in a prominent place before the people. But seat two lowlifes opposite him and have them testify that he cursed both God and the ruler. Then take him out and stone him to death." As soon as Jezebel heard the news, she told Ahab, "Go now and take possession of Naboth the Jezreelite's vineyard. He is dead." When Ahab learned that Naboth was dead, he went down to take possession of the vineyard. Then the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Go down to meet Ahab, ruler of Israel, ruler of Samaria. He is now in the process of taking possession of Naboth's vineyard. Say to Ahab, 'This is what Yahweh says: You murder, and you dispossess as well?' Tell him, 'This is what Yahweh says: In the place where dog's licked up Naboth's blood, dog's will lick up your blood—yes, yours!' " Ahab said to Elijah, "So you've found me at last, old enemy?" "I found you," Elijah replied, "because you gave yourself over to do what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh who says, 'I will bring disaster down upon you.'"

Reflection

Don't you just love the Old Testament? Both God and Jezebel seem to come from the same stock in many ways as neither pull their punches when it comes to Naboth's vineyard. Of course God is on the side of justice and Jezebel is on the side of self-enrichment, but does that justify either of them in what they do?

Then again these stories, while they have some historical framework, have a more specific purpose to measure each king against the 'ideal' king, David, and against the wealth and political prowess they accumulate. It is against their faithfulness to God, or their lack of it, that they are measured. Most end up being painted unfavourably, especially the Northern Kingdom kings of Israel.

Jezebel, the king's wife, is everything that is anathema to Israel: a foreigner who worships foreign gods. It was almost inevitable that she was going to be portrayed as a nasty piece of work, ruthless and a bad influence over her husband-king. Might this story be a story of the clash between different political and religious powers? In many ways people in this story are caricatures illustrating the deep set feelings of the Hebrews in a land they now call their own towards those from whom they took it.

Ahab makes a generous offer for Naboth's vineyard but then it isn't about the justice of the purchase, it is a story about recognising who the land belongs to.

Who owns it: God or the king? It is a question that echoes throughout the Old Testament. Interestingly, however, Ahab doesn't seem to wish to push Naboth on this. It is as if Ahab still considers God's blessing of the land to the people as something that still had merit.

The same cannot be said for Jezebel. She is pictured as someone without much of a conscience and indeed treats Israel the same way she treats her husband: as a lap dog who is there to do obey her every command. When Elijah finds out and is sent to speak to Naboth, who is found in the vineyard, as always the punishment fits the crime.

Yet there is more to this prophetic encounter as the prophet Elijah has the duty to expose the crime that has been committed. It is perhaps the second strand to living prophetic lives: proclaim what is just and right but also expose what is wrong and unjust. Prophetic lives are lives of comparison between what is happening and what God requires. You cannot be prophetic in a vacuum.

It is an ironic story for the complaint Elijah levels about God's land being taken over by the foreigner is what his own ancestors did to the Canaanites generations earlier. Yet it is a powerful contemporary story for us too because as we reflect on it we cannot help overlay it on those present stories of land possession, of the more powerful ignoring the beliefs and culture of another for the sake of their land and possessions. Who are the Jezebels and the Ahabs today and who are the Naboths? If we dare be prophetic about this, shall we name the injustice and the perpetrators that might bear our names and shall we live prophetic lives in the midst of the injustice done in our name?

An example today might be the Kayapó people in Brazil who tried to protect the land on which they have lived for generations from total destruction to make way for a huge hydroelectric dam that will displace up to 40,000 people and flood 400,000 hectares of rain forest. Who said the Old Testament wasn't relevant? Don't you just love it!

Prayer

May all our words be filled with silence:
a space broad enough to pray for the world's needs,
and a place deep enough to meet the Spirit in it.

We place a silence here for all conflict,
where words can never heal,
only the witness of peace-filled living,
and the touch of love.
(a moment of silence)

We place a silence here for all hurt,
where words can never repair,
only the witness of grace-filled living,
and the touch of love.
(a moment of silence)

We place a silence here for all injustice,
where words can never break through,
only the witness of truth-filled living,
and the touch of love.
(a moment of silence)

We place a silence here for all victims,
where words can never say sorry,
only the witness of compassion-filled living,
and the touch of love.
(a moment of silence)

We place a silence here for all people,
where words are confusing and confused,
and only the witness of patient living,
and the touch of love, speaks.
(a moment of silence)

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
may all our words be filled with silence:
space broad enough to pray what the world needs,
and a place deep enough to meet her in it.

Blessing

Be assured that the presence goes with us.
As we face the world with renewed faith and hope;
The word abides with us.
So may our hearts burn within us as we dare to trust.
Love is real and alive in us.
So we live in gratitude each and every day;
We will love sincerely and live confidently.

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