

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/Otu1D36Jouw>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

All creation holds its breath.

The time is almost here.

The heavenly choir of angels waits for its cue to sing.

Excitement is all around us.

We prepare our hearts-The grace of God takes on human form.

Good news! Emmanuel, God-with-Us, comes to us.

We gather to make ready our hearts

for the coming of Christ, our hope.

As this season of "sparkle and bright" unfolds before us, the glimmering promises of hope lie like boxed jewels awaiting an adoring light.

May we hold fast to hope's patient possibilities. May we lift them high that they might catch the light of our dreams and shine bright in our broken world. And may we instill hope's challenge in the hearts of our children that they, too, will live it into meaning -pouring their lives, as we do ours, into making it real- for themselves, for each other, for the world. May Hope light the world this Christmas.

Reading

Isaiah 2: 1-5

This is what Isaiah ben-Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's Temple will be established as the most important mountain and raised above all other hills—

all nations will stream toward it. Many people will come and say:

"Come, let us climb Yahweh's mountain

to the Temple of the God of Jacob, that we may be instructed in God's ways

and walk in God's paths." Instruction will be given from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations and render decisions for many countries. They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation will not raise the sword against another, and never again will they train for war. O house of Leah and Rachel and Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of Yahweh!

Reflection

The over-excited anticipation of Christmas has taken a sombre turn this year as it begins in the wake of the horror of the events in Ukraine. The twinkling of lights, carols, seasonal songs, bright wrapping paper, Santas, and stable scenes, all feel out of place in the aftermath with the rolling news that tells of raids, gun fights, explosions, and aerial bombing in distant lands.

How do we tell the good news of the Prince of Peace this year?

How can we stand in solidarity with the citizens of Ukraine and also seek a peaceful and equitable resolution in other conflict zones across the world?

As in all such situations there is a need to pause before responding. In Matthew's telling of Jesus' birth we have the example of Herod's over-reaction. He hears of the birth of a pretender to his throne and orders every child under two to be killed. Girls and boys, toddlers and newborns, were all caught up in his fear. In the story, the fear he had about one tiny baby results in mass slaughter.

We face a similar dilemma. Throughout our nation and around the world Muslims have been declaring 'Not in our name' but their voices are drowned out as pre-existing Islamophobia hits new heights. Our fellow children of Abraham declare the Koran does not condone the killing of innocents, but others who share their heritage preach hatred, violence, bigotry, and murder. As Christians we could face the same condemnation if our faith was solely judged on the worst parts of our shared history. With the Crusades; those affirming different strands of our faith fighting wars between nations, and persecution within nations; slavery, Nazi Germany, and apartheid, to name but part of our regrettable history, we are not blameless. None of these point to the man who preached 'love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.' Who declared the presence and the coming Kingdom of God, the Shalom of God, where peace, justice, love and mercy are the reality.

Where we stand now is shadowed by history, is confused by multiple interpretations of history, and our current actions can either reinforce existing prejudice or move us forward into an equitable future. There are no simple solutions to our current situation. My pacifism does not extend so far as to not consider any violent response, but does it not need to be part of an equally well-resourced plan for gaining consensus for action, dealing with the aftermath, and engaging with the fear, prejudice, injustice, and ignorance which fuels the cycle of hatred we are stuck in. As the saying goes, 'if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail', the same is true for our nations. We have standing armed forces, so giving the order to attack can be straightforward. We have the resources at hand to respond with overwhelming force and violence. That can make us feel better, safer, justified, but it requires little sacrifice on our part, and perhaps the ultimate sacrifice for members of our forces, those we oppose, and those caught in-between. Declaring war on ISIS or the Taliban or refugees in boats is but one part to any solution. The millions that can be spent deploying our stockpiles of weapons needs to be matched with funds to support refugees, rebuild homes, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure. There needs to be as much effort as it takes to mobilise our Army, Navy and Air Force, taken to gain a consensus for action, for building trust and understanding, and taking the time to

help rebuild in a humble and respectful way, coming alongside the citizens of the nations affected.

It also requires our personal sacrifice. Having and maintaining our stockpiles of weapons is mainly covered by our existing taxes, acting in such a way as to have a long-term solution will cost more money which we may have to bear. It also needs us to raise our voices in solidarity, but also in compassion and mercy. It needs us to remain focussed on a long-term goal and ensure our political leaders do too. It requires that we go out of our way to better understand our neighbours, to challenge prejudice and bigotry, commit to building relationships, and struggle to remain on common ground with each other.

There is no easy solution before us, and maybe the first step is to acknowledge that. There is also no true solution that does not require us to participate. Public opinion can influence decision-making and we have a role in influencing it and encouraging our political leaders in changing it. We are called to raise our voices on Christ's behalf, following his example, and seeking the Kingdom.

Prayer

Let us pray for all who have waited a long time for help, and who are still waiting for: the opportunity of gainful employment; rescue from neglect or abuse; reunion with loved ones; adequate food and housing; the end of war or terrorism; a friend in whom they can confide; the healing of mind, body or spirit; a faith that lives and works; a church where they can feel accepted.

May those who are committed to loving others, be inspired to put that love efficiently into practice during this Advent, that the suffering children may not be kept waiting any longer for the justice and compassion which is Christ's will for them.

How many times, has Christ, come to us unwelcomed? How often has he visited yet we have been too busy to notice, spoken yet we have been too full of ourselves. May we change all our insensitive habits this Advent and become more sensitive to Christ's immediate comings in the ups and downs of each ordinary day.

Blessing

We are pilgrims always, journeying homewards
May the Spirit walk with us along the roads.
We look for peace and we cry for justice.
May the Spirit make us peacemakers all our days.
We wait and long for the coming of Jesus.

May the Spirit fill us with wonder and with great hope.

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