

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

www.stmagnus.org

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

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.

You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/jCnKD0FULHg>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

Come, let us walk the road that Mary walked
the challenging road
from Nazareth to Bethlehem
not knowing what the future holds.

Come, let us walk the road that Joseph walked
not sure what we are taking on
but standing to be counted
no matter the cost of such love.

Come, let us walk the road that Jesus walked
from Bethlehem - via Jerusalem - to Galilee
from Advent to Easter
from new birth to new life.

As this season of "sparkle and bright" unfolds around us, the silent prayers of peace lie like stars hidden in a clouded night, May we inspire the world with peace. May we touch it to our lives that in every place of stress, frustration, or fear, we might feel the presence of peace easing our hearts and transforming our lives. And may we share its healing power with our children, that they might become the inspiration through which peace makes its way to a new yet-dreamt-of world.

Reading

Isaiah 11: 2-9

The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on you—
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and reverence for Yahweh. You will delight in obeying Yahweh, and you won't judge by appearances, or make decisions by hearsay. You will treat poor people with fairness and will uphold the rights of the land's downtrodden. Justice will be the belt around this your waist—
faithfulness will gird you up. Then the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the lion cub will graze together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear; their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The baby will play next to the den of the cobra, and the toddler will dance over the viper's nest. There will be no harm, no destruction anywhere in my holy mountain; for as water fills the sea, so the land will be filled with knowledge of Yahweh.

Reflection

The leopard will lie down with the young goat. But the young goat won't get much sleep!.

That was one of my lecturers, Douglas Templeton's take on this passage and others like it: beautiful, poetic visions of a dream world that never

have been, and never will be, realised in the world as we know it. No amount of genetic engineering is going to turn a lion or a wolf vegetarian; even if that did happen the new creature would be so far removed from the old that it would have to be declared a new species. The nursing child might well be safe playing beside the snake's nest, but it would be a brave mother who put the promise to the test, and any church promoting such ideas would instantly fall foul of PVG legislation.

This is poetic hyperbole, prophetic encouragement, not prediction of future reality. Things may be so bad for Isaiah's people in exile that the prospect of living in peace and freedom seems as remote as a kid snuggling up to a leopard, or a cow and a bear munching happily on the same field of grass, but the prophet wants his people to know that with God anything is possible.

The next question is what needs to happen in order for such a radical transformation to take place. An inspirational leader will appear; one such was the story of the martyrdom of the seven Trappist monks of the monastery of Our Lady of Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria, in 1996. The monastery had been serving as a Christian witness within the Islamic country. Some Islamist groups, who had been likely to win the election cancelled by the government in 1991, took up arms against the government, and the government in turn took steps to eradicate them. The monks of Our Lady of Atlas, who took no sides in the conflict, decided to stay, even when the situation became very grave. Their leader, Dom Christian de Cherge, stated:

"For this is what I shall be able to do, if God wills: Immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him his children of Islam as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, fruit of his Passion, filled with the gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness in playing with the differences.'

One night in March 1996, men came to the monastery and abducted seven of the monks. Holding the monks hostage, the abductors demanded the release of rebel hostages held by the government. This was not done and a week later, the mutilated remains of the seven were found by the side of the road.

Condemnations came from Muslims and Christians around the world. Yet what the Algerian martyrs have done is to suggest by their lives and martyrdom a new way of being a missionary. Their lives have a

significance that vastly transcends their particular time and place. They are exemplars of a new vision of transformative lives that involves not so much converting people to Christianity as fostering communion among the people with whom we live, and manifesting respect, understanding, and appreciation of their religion. Such approaches are the only way to bring to an end to the wars and antipathies that have existed between different religions and sacred traditions since history began.

We are now moving into a global culture, a pluralistic world society where grandiose plans for our own particular religious persuasion are either out of date or inappropriate. To this situation, the Algerian martyrs simply wanted to have dialogue with their impoverished Muslim neighbours, whom they knew were loved by Christ to the point of his laying down his life for them. They wanted to manifest by their own lives the infinite love of Christ for their Muslim neighbours. They supported a clinic, provided agricultural know-how, and gave generous hospitality to everyone who came to their guesthouse.

The monks thought through, in their own conscience and in the course of many community discussions, what it meant to remain there. The monks knew what they were facing, but they were dedicated to continuing the dialogue of presence to their neighbours, even in the face of imminent persecution. Without intending to, they pioneered a new kind of dialogue that might be called 'dialogue unto death.'

The Algerian martyrs refused to judge or condemn anyone: the killers and those who were killed, the oppressors and those who were oppressed. For them, the human family consisted of brothers and sisters — no enemies, not even friends. Their insight was that the world is advancing toward global unification in such a way that the teaching of Jesus — 'that all may be one' — is at last coming into full focus.

Prayer

Jesus spoke of righteousness and justice, and so we give thanks for the high standards that his Way expects of people in power, even if, as people of the Word, we have failed more often than we have succeeded in living up to them.

Amidst all the opportunities there are for politicians to indulge their appetite for power; for business people to grow rich at the expense of

the poor;
for religious leaders to exploit the trust that is placed in them;
we give thanks for people of integrity in all these walks of life.

And for Jesus, who fulfilled the hopes of his people,
and the long-ago vision of the prophet in so many ways.
He was confident, but never arrogant; wise, but not superior;
strong, but not a bully; good, but never self-righteous or judgemental.

We pray for the people who were always his chief concern:
the little ones who need to be protected, and whose trust must never be
abused. We pray for adults living with the scars of childhood neglect or
abuse;
for children forced to grow up too soon, and those who may not get the
chance to grow up at all.

We pray for all whose lives and whose hopes have been cut short by war;
for homes and churches riven by conflict. We pray for victims of
injustice; those accused of crimes they have not committed, while others
escape unpunished
because they have money and influence.

As we await the coming of the wise counsellor, the prince of peace, may
we not rest until this world is as close as it possibly can be to the
peaceable kingdom of which the prophet dreamed,
and that Jesus was born, lived and died to establish here on earth.
Amen.

Blessing

May vision be our companion. May we find new life everywhere. May we
speak into the silence
and trust the one who is bringing new hope to us all.

Go in peace,
a peace that has wolves and lambs playing together.
In this peace
we go.

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