

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/1b7ZA0an29Q>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

In our tradition the time of rest begins with the lighting of a candle. In this moment the stopping truly begins. To take a few breaths, to allow the mind to quieten. This is the beginning of sacred time.

We light this candle
to kindle a flame of warmth
as a reminder
of the connection that draws us in
to a community that opens us up in gratitude
for the gift of this day,
alive.

There is mystery at the heart of things and it is alive and sings its song
into all that is moribund and plain.

It is born of a wonder that only increases: for in exploring the wonder grows;
in understanding a greater puzzle is revealed; the more we dive into the riddle
we find a yet greater enigma.

Let us bring all our traditions, paths of experiences, generations of questions,
and rich tapestry of faith and together, weave a gathering here with the ever
evolving, always transfiguring, forever renewing, Jesus Christ.

Reading

Matthew 22; 31-40

Jesus said 'Haven't you read what God told you? 'I am the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Isaac and Rebecca, the God of Jacob and Rachel and Leah! God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'" When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at Jesus' teaching. When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert on the Law, attempted to trick Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which commandment of the Law is the greatest?" Jesus answered: " 'You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' "That is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law is based—and the Prophets as well."

Reflection

Like Looking at the Sun

It is amazing how often we fail a most basic mark of the faith.

It is a downright scandal how rarely it is preached.

It's questionable how directly our religious and moral practices stem from it. Yet if we believe the direct words of Jesus Himself—the very ability of others to recognise our Christian identity is dependent on how we follow this.

We gather in churches. We have elaborate worship and praise. And yet we barely give lip service to the first and foremost of the commandments. When we do, it is often to give exceptions—No, Jesus didn't really mean that . . .

I'm talking about the Greatest Commandment—love God and love neighbour.
Abundantly.

Christians often spend more time talking about obscure lines from the Bible or obscure doctrines about obscure topics, and it's amazing how very little time we actually spend on the fundamental, core command that Jesus Himself preached to us.

Jesus is very clear that the fundamental commandment is to love God and neighbour and that our public witness of this will be the very mark of our Christian identity. That's it. All else gets at best a distant second or third place.

And yet our denial knows no bounds.

It is so simple, yet so difficult. We do everything we can to make being "Christian" about something else-it's about church membership, a certain baptismal formula or having the right "beliefs." Even denominations at odds with one another have this in common!

You could argue those other things are important, too. But we put them front and centre when Jesus was clear that something else was front and centre. He actually comes out and tells us to put this commandment first, and we do everything except that.

We don't outright deny the Greatest Commandment. Oh no, we would never be so bold. Rather, we do something far more sinister-we just sort of brush it aside, put it on a pedestal and otherwise ignore it.

We box it in, limit it, put the ropes around it because, in truth, it scares the living daylights out of us.

And so we find ways to rationalise. We find every excuse NOT to love abundantly, NOT to overflow with mercy, NOT to do all that love requires of us. For example, we can find all sorts of examples in Scripture and Church history to support all sorts of actions. The Bible is full of war and violence of all kinds, so we could claim Biblical support for these actions. Before we blindly imitate them and claim some Scriptural backing, we should ask-does this love God and love neighbour abundantly? If not, it should go to the fires of Gehenna.

Still, individuals and churches do everything they can to wiggle out of these requirements and try to make it out to be about something else. It's not that those other things haven't their place-the scandal is the disproportionate amount of energy we put into those obscure things compared to what should be first and foremost.

And let's be clear: It's absolutely and totally a scandal how we treat the Greatest Commandment.

We give lip service to love. We attempt it here and there. But we are like unruly teenagers whose parents have told us to clean the house while they are gone. So we first spend several hours watching TV, talking to our friends, and yes, thinking about cleaning the house from time to time. About 10 minutes before they return, we run roughshod over the house to give the appearance of cleanliness.

That is how we regard the commandment to love. We do talk about it, just enough to get that monkey off our back and claim that we are following it. But the level of enthusiasm and energy we put into it is not anywhere near what we are commanded to do by Jesus.

To me, Jesus' message is both incredibly simple and also incredibly difficult at the same time. Little children get it. The poor get it. Those on the margins of

society get it. The more and more "stuff" we have just makes it more difficult to hear the message. It doesn't matter if the "stuff" is material wealth or just something else we are holding onto. It could be anger. It could be our ego. It could be our need to be right. The Gospels predict this. The more attached people were to their stuff the harder time they had accepting the truth of Jesus and following.

Let that stuff go and you start to see Jesus.

Maybe the message of Jesus is like looking into the sun. It's just so bright we can't do it for long. All we can do is hint and squint at it and try to come back to it later when we are ready. There is a case to be made for that.

Maybe humankind will always be sun worshippers-the first and perhaps the only religion.

But our active participation in love puts us in line with love, the creative energy of the universe, and love is the wavelength of eternity.

Prayer

We pray for the needs of all those across this small planet who are in great need this day, and especially for the people of southern Turkey and northern Syria

We mindful of all those who suffer because of the winter weather, of all who suffer because they experience the winter of war, of all those who suffer the cold winds of oppression and violence,

May all who suffer this day experience compassion through their brothers and sisters.

May this morning prayer awaken us to turn to the needs of all who ask us for help this day into our personal needs. May this brief time of prayer make us aware

that the needs of those whom we assist are really Christ's needs.

May we have the grace to see him in all whom we meet and serve.

With that sacred vision this prayer of communion with his Spirit will have no end. Blessed and beautiful is our journey with Christ.

May his light be our sun this winter day.

Blessing

May the God you see in all the colours of creation arouse in you a sense of awe and wonder.

May the God who is a sacred presence be real to you.

May the God who is a source of inspiration and courage
keep calling you forward.

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