

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/BY8bSEweZt0>

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 choose not to give in to fear:

Even when we are threatened by violence and abuse,
we choose to believe in the power of love.

We choose not to be led by despair:

Even when dreams fail and the world seems to grow colder and more
broken,

we choose to believe in the power of hope.

We choose not to be blinded by cynicism:
Even when joy and celebration feel naïve and frivolous,
we choose to believe in the power of faith.

We choose not to be over-awed by death:
Even when grief shuts out all other voices,
we choose to believe in the power of life.
In every time,
in each place,
with all people,
may resurrection rise up within us,
and lead us to new, creative, healing choices.

Reading

Mark 12: 28-37

One of the religious scholars who had listened to them debating and had observed how well Jesus had answered them, now came up and put a question to him: "Which is the foremost of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "This is the foremost: 'Hear, O Israel, God, our God, is one. You must love the Most High God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." The scholar said to Jesus, "Well spoken, Teacher! What you have said is true: the Most High is one and there is no other. To love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself—this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice." Jesus, seeing how wisely this scholar had spoken, said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to question Jesus any more. Later, as Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he went on to say, "How can the religious scholars claim, 'The Messiah is David's heir'? David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, 'God said to my Sovereign: "Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your foot.'" If David addresses this one as 'Sovereign,' how can the

Sovereign be David's heir?" The large crowd listened to this with delight.

Reflection

This is Part 3 of a 5-Part Series: I wonder What Makes A Christian?

I can go into any number of churches this weekend and hear them "preach salvation." What does this mean? Believe this-or-that and we'll be guaranteed an afterlife in Heaven. In many churches across Christendom, this is probably the most common theme in a Sunday morning sermon, Bible study or prayer gathering of any kind, especially in the Evangelical world.

I can understand why people are preoccupied with their own fate-but in the words of Brian McLaren, when did Christianity become an "earth evacuation plan"?

There are a lot of assumptions that go into this kind of theology. It's quite a loaded statement, actually! We assume that the point of religion is to secure an afterlife-an afterlife that is either questionable or not available to us otherwise-and that the key to navigating this properly is to have the right beliefs.

Similar things happen in both Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. The Creed is rolled out about halfway through liturgy with a litany of "I believe this" and "I believe that."

When did belief trump action? Jesus seems to say it's not what you think but rather who you are that matters:

Jesus is very clear that the fundamental commandment is to love God and neighbour and that our witness of this will be the very mark of our Christian identity, that our closeness to the Kingdom as we heard in our reading, and participation in eternity are contingent on it and that all other rules and parameters can be understood only in light of it.

An incredible trickery happened somewhere in the history of Christianity. Early Christians were known as "followers of the Way". Christianity was a holistic practice that impacted all areas of their lives. Somewhere this got truncated, and Christianity started looking more and more like a detached mental exercise.

I suspect I know why: Actions are difficult. Beliefs are easy. Changing one's lifestyle is just about the hardest thing to do. Ask anyone who has struggled with an addiction or has tried to lose weight or change any habit.

A lot of churches start out with John 3:16 as their starting point. Catholics and many mainline Protestants start off with their doctrinal beliefs as expressed by the Creed. In this series, by exploring the centrality of the Greatest Commandment to the faith—putting the commandment to love God and love one another as first and then reordering everything else in light of that. We may end up with a different theology, and frankly a whole different church this way!

For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him
shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

There is no other verse more widely shared as the end all, be all of Christianity. It's like Christians are saying: If all you hear from Scripture is one thing, make sure you hear John 3:16.

What's curious is that Jesus gave very different advice. When asked directly, He said follow the Greatest Commandment: Love God and neighbour abundantly. He didn't say "believe." He said, "do."

What's got us into this whole mess is our understanding of the word "belief." Scholars say that the modern Western mind has been thoroughly influenced by the ultra-literalist approach to English Law that was in vogue several centuries ago. Words were stripped of their literary and artistic allusions and taken in the most basic, face value way.

Scripture was never written to be read that way, but each of us brings his or her own interpretive lens whenever we read anything.

We end up confident that if we profess the name of Jesus as the God we adhere to, then our duties toward our salvation are fulfilled. We have to say "Jesus" and not "Mohammed" or "Buddha" or "Krishna."

It's no wonder that many denominations in Christianity have violently split due to their vociferous disagreements over theological matters.

In The Name Of . . .

Imagine if we were to say I am living my life "in the name of Martin Luther King, or Desmond Tutu?"

Let's be honest-that would probably sound pretty awkward at first, because nobody talks like that. But with a moment of reflection, we would probably think this sounds like an old fashioned, perhaps overly poetic way of saying that we try to emulate the values and lifestyle of those two.

In other words, we are trying to live in the tradition of MLK or Tutu. If we say we are trying to live, "in the name of MLK or Tutu," you would expect us to lead a movement for civil rights or practice nonviolent resistance to structures of injustice. We can't really separate the name of MLK or Tutu from those activities, because those activities are why we know the name of MLK or Tutu in the first place.

In other words, if we are going to be saved by the "name" of Jesus, let's not be so literalistic to think uttering the name itself is the only condition. "The name of Jesus" is shorthand for all that Jesus has said and done-His teachings and model of life.

If we're going to be saved "in the name of Jesus," it's because we are living into the Greatest Commandment.

John 3:16 is a beautiful verse, understood this way-that Jesus' sharing of his life with us comes out of love, and that all who participate in that love through loving both God and one another follow in the Way of Jesus -to love Jesus so much that we imitate Him and follow His Way. To believe in His teachings and message so much that we follow it.

Prayer

How do we do what's right,
when it costs us so much to follow Jesus?
when the good and the true and the beautiful
cannot be purchased
in a 'buy-now-pay-later' scheme
as a quick-fix solution to our longing for life?
How do we do what's right when it takes so much time,
and when the life it brings comes
according to the timetable of eternity,
not the stopwatch of our up-to-the-minute world?

How do our leaders do what's right,
for the weak and marginalised,

for people beyond our borders,
when the cost could be to forfeit their opportunity to lead?

How do our corporations do what's right,
for our suffering planet,
for the rights and needs of the poor,
when the cost could be to lose investors,
and sacrifice the lives of their own workers?

How do our protectors do what's right,
for the broken and desperate,
for our allies and enemies,
when the cost could be to face the attacks
of those they seek to defend?

We need to learn how to do what's right,
our world needs us to learn it;
we need to count the cost of Jesus' call,
and measure it against the abundant life he promised.
May we, in our own small way, help each other, to be those who do the
right thing, and in so doing, demonstrate the goodness
that following him brings to all.

Blessing

Take off your shoes:
We hear a word that leads to danger.
The ground on which we stand is holy ground.

Go speak a word:
We will challenge lies that mean oppression.
The world in which we live is God's domain.

Come travel on.
We will leave a past which wants to bind us.
The place towards which we go is promised land.

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

