

## ***inSt Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall***

[www.stmagnus.org](http://www.stmagnus.org)

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation](https://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.

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You can find our Sunday worship here.

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

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/DdiuZ-DUEqw>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

[stmagnuszoom@gmail.com](mailto:stmagnuszoom@gmail.com)

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

To light even one candle is to say to the darkness of oppression: 'We beg to differ.'

To light a candle is to claim the power to make a difference.

May the sparks of the God that is Love  
Ignite our passion for change

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.

*John's gospel tells us; For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge but to be its Saviour.*

Yes, really. The world and all of it. Not just the chosen few. The world and all of it.

And yes, that does mean them, and them and them. No, it can't be? Can it? Yes, it can be. And it is. Really? Them? Really? For them too? This is amazing. Yes, it is. Truly amazing. But don't just stand there, don't be silent. This is the Good News. Nicodemus came to hear this truth. He came, heard and went. He had questions too. And that's ok. It's all ok.

*For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge but to be its Saviour.*

Reading  
**2 Corinthians 8; 8-17**

It is not an order I am giving you, but the opportunity to test your generous love against the earnestness which others show. You are well acquainted with the favour shown by our Saviour Jesus Christ, who, though rich, became poor for your sake, so that you might become rich by Christ's poverty.

As I say, this is only a suggestion—it's my counsel about what is best for you in this matter. A year ago, you were not only the first to act, but you did so willingly. Finish that work, so that your eagerness to begin can be matched by your eagerness to finish, according to your means. For so long as the heart is willing, it's what you have that is acceptable, not what you don't have. This doesn't mean that by giving relief to others, you ought to make things difficult for yourselves! It's just a question of balancing what happens to be your surplus now against their present need; one day they may have something to spare that will supply your own need. That is how we strike a balance, as scripture says: "The one who gathered much had no excess, and the one who gathered little did not go short." I thank God for putting into the heart of Titus the same concern for you that I have myself. He did what he was asked, and because he is concerned, he is coming to you now on his own initiative.

## Reflection

Our society is one of the most unequal in the developed world - and that inequality is getting worse. Not only is there a huge divide between the richest and poorest, but increasingly there's a divide between the elderly and the young. But is that inequality a problem, and is it particularly a problem which should concern us as Christians and people of faith?

Inequality is certainly a problem. The life expectancy of a Londoner at the bottom end of the income pile is 25 years lower than that of his richest neighbours. Yet while the poor - even the working poor - have to resort to food banks and pay day lenders to get them precariously through their lives, at the other end of the scale people are rewarded wildly beyond their merits. And when some of us have so much - the richest 10 per cent of households own 850 times the wealth of the poorest - evidence shows that the bigger the divide, the more we look the other way.

And yet our Government seems keen to implement measures which increase inequality and drive an ever- bigger wedge between the poorest in society and the wealthier amongst us. This doesn't seem likely to enhance social cohesiveness and David Cameron's famous phrase "we're all in this together" makes his voice seem just sounding brass to those for whom he and his successors show scant charity. If little else is clear in today's Britain, it's clear that we're definitely not all in this together.

More than this, however, I believe inequality is particularly a issue for Christians and a problem with which we should concern ourselves. The early Christians lived in a society which was even more unequal and polarised than our own. But they lived in such a way as to minimise the effects of their society; they shared their wealth and looked after each other. They modelled the good society and obeyed Jesus' injunction: Love one another as I have loved you.

The common practice was to treat each other as equals, addressing each other as brother and sister.

In these few words that we read in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul sets out the principle of a system founded on loving your neighbour

as yourself; you share your plenty in the hope and expectation that they will do the same for you when you need assistance. This is also significant in Jesus' prayer where we are told to ask, not for riches, but only our daily bread - enough, not a surplus. "The goal is equality"; this simple prescription is the way to ensure that the abundant bounty of the world supplies the needs of all rather than just the wants of a few; if we all take just what we need, or, if we find we have more than we need, share what we have, there is enough to go round.

Why is it that this Christian message seems to have been so easily forgotten? Why have we departed so far from this vision of how a Christian society should function?

Paul's prescription for the good society is just as true for the world at large. Inequality is a problem not just within the UK, but between developed countries like the UK and the developing nations of the world. There is enough food in the world and enough wealth for everyone to have a decent life; but these goods are not fairly distributed. The result is hunger and extreme poverty for millions of people, and premature death from easily preventable diseases.

The problem is of unfair distribution. Some countries, just as much as some individuals, taking more than their fair share. The problem is greed and self-interest coupled with a system which encourages and rewards this. While some have more than they could ever possibly need, others do not have enough. The economy does not function as our tool to ensure efficient and fair distribution, but as a cruel master which enslaves and impoverishes far too many of us. This is not, surely, the way of the Kingdom of God.

Inequality is a moral issue. It is a deep, divisive and corrosive force working in the world today. It destroys the hopes, reasonable expectations, and quality of life of millions of people. Tackling inequality is the first step to build the Kingdom of God.

And that's why we should all care about inequality and why we should all work within our churches and wider communities to promote a fairer, more inclusive society; a society which allows all its members to grow to their full potential.

The prophets called their leaders to account. Thousands of years on, for those of us with ears to hear, the prophetic voice is still proclaiming the

same message, inspired by a divine vision of life in all its fullness. Tackling inequality means fighting for a good life for every person on the planet, not just for a privileged few; life as it could be, in all its glory, rather than the impoverished and stunted life it all too often is for so many of the world's inhabitants.

### Prayer

We gather today as an act of solidarity; to be a voice for the voiceless, to stand alongside those who are running out of hope, to affirm companionship in the face of adversity. We gather as a sign of hope in the midst of life's tragedies. We stand together in the fire of injustice without shrinking back; gathering, remembering, honouring life and nature, taking stock, making connections. strengthening universal bonds of grace and peace.

What if God's people of all faiths loved one another?

What if God's children of every colour and nation loved one another?

What if God's daughters and sons of every label loved one another?

Would we miss the illusion of superiority?

Would we miss the exhilaration of judging others?

Would we miss the view from higher moral ground?

Would "we" miss the thrill of killing "them" with swords, or words?

What if we loved one another?

What if we started with simple respect?

What if we humans become what we were intended to be?

Superiority...stifled by the quiet but tireless power of humility.  
Judgment...overruled by the celebration of diversity that enriches us.  
High ground...held only by those tired, dusty heroes who emptied themselves in service.

Blood red battlefields...transformed into green meadows of mercy and healing.

What if we loved one another?

What if we started with simple respect?

What if we humans become what we were intended to be?

Would God's people of all faith-languages worship in unison?  
Would God's children of every colour compose one picture?  
Would God's daughters and sons of every label celebrate as siblings?

Would we then finally understand the meaning of Incarnation?

### Blessing

Now as we each go about our days  
May we daily walk the earth with gentleness and grace Each step a death;  
each step a birth

May we celebrate the mystery living through us Seeking to recognize in  
life and death

The Goodness born in every breath

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