

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/wzTfEvrD tg>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

In lighting this candle we become aware that the power of resurrection has forever changed who we are, and given us the courage to boldly proclaim a living faith.

Today we celebrate: new life, new joy, new dreams.

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.

At a time like this, when the triumph of death seems inevitable

and the suffering around us makes us want to turn away,
we commit to resurrection:

In the secret chambers where power-brokers meet,
we commit to making the voice of life and justice heard;
In the crisis moments when quick decisions must be made
that hold human lives in the balance

we commit to making peace and co-existence the challenge we raise;

In the forgotten corners where the powerless and poor
daily walk the valley of the shadow of death,
we commit to equity, compassion and giving;

In the dying places on our planet where human carelessness and
consumption have threatened the survival of all
we commit to simplicity and sustainability

As Jesus stands among us now,
in his resurrected glory,
May we know the power of life;
May we turn away from death;
And may we become agents of resurrection,
where ever we find ourselves.

Reading
Matthew 28: 1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary of Magdala came with Mary to inspect the tomb. Suddenly, there was a severe earthquake, and an angel of God descended from heaven, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. The angel's appearance was like lightning, with garments white as snow. The guards shook with fear and fell down as though they were dead. Then the angel spoke, addressing the women: "Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus the crucified, who is no longer here. Jesus has been raised, exactly as it was foretold. Come and see the burial place. Then go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead and now goes ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there. That is the message I have for you." The women hurried away from the tomb with awe and great joy and ran to carry the good news to the disciples. Suddenly Jesus stood before them and said, "Shalom!" The women came up, embraced Jesus' feet and worshiped. At this, Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see me."

Reflection

The sun has not yet risen. It's Sunday morning. A small group of Jewish women straggle along a path towards a cliffside cemetery outside the city walls. Gravel crunches under their sandals. Their breath makes little clouds in the chilly morning air.

They don't talk much. They did all their talking while they were imprisoned by the Sabbath laws that prevented them from doing any work on the seventh day of the week.

So they couldn't go out to offer last rites to the man who had been killed on Friday, to anoint his still and stiffening body with oils and ointments, to prepare it for the long sleep from which no one awakened.

They had done all their talking during the enforced confinement of the Sabbath. They had talked about their growing relationship with this man. The first pearly light of dawn lined the eastern horizon as they shuffled along the path to the tomb..

The only thing they talked about was how they would be able to open the tomb. If they would be able to open the tomb.

But when they got there, the tomb was open. Empty. The soldiers guarding it had run away.

The Easter sun rose over the horizon, its glare shining into their eyes, blinding them.

I know how this story ends. I've heard it every year for 60 odd years.

Because it's written in the Bible. Portions of it are read every Easter.

Mark's gospel leaves the story just where I did, two paragraphs ago - the grieving women find the tomb empty. They leave it in fear and despair.

Luke and Matthew add some detail. An angel, or a stranger, tells the women that the person they love is not there. He is alive, in a new way.

Only John's gospel adds the story of one of those women, Mary known as the Magdalene, personally encountering that person who is not dead, after all.

I know how that story ends.

The sun has not yet risen. It's Sunday morning. A small group of Ukrainian women creep from the underground bunker where they have been imprisoned for the last few days. Even underground, they could feel the earth tremble as bombs showered on the city above them.

They had been sent by their men into an old wine cellar, for their safety.

The men stayed up top to defend their city.

And the bombs kept falling.

The single lightbulb that drove back the darkness of the cellar flickered every time another bomb exploded. Every time another historic building collapsed. Every time another powerline snapped.

Huddled together for support and comfort, they talked through the nights about what was happening to them. To their country. To their men, at the front, vulnerable in the open.

Then, in their overnight vigil, silence. Silence in their bunker - they had talked themselves out. And silence overhead - the bombs had stopped.

So they opened their doors and ventured up to the streets.

The first pearly light of dawn lined the eastern horizon as they stumbled up into the streets..

Their breath made little puffs of mist in the chilly morning air. Gravel crunched beneath the soles of their trainers. Gravel that had been concrete. That had been walls, and sidewalks, and parking garages. The streets were littered with blocks and bricks and bodies.

But aside from debris, the streets were empty. Silent as a tomb.

They can see no men. Anywhere.

The Easter sun rises over the horizon, its glare shining into their eyes, blinding them as they look, desperately, for survivors.

And I don't know how *this* story ends.

Maybe the men are dead, corpses crushed by falling walls, incinerated by raging fires, vaporized by high explosives.

Or maybe some men appear out of the ruins of buildings. They struggle over the piles of rubble. They cough in the clouds of dust.

And some of the women see their husbands, their lovers, their fathers or sons, and call their names and run to them and cling to them and sob with sheer joy and relief. Their dead are alive after all. They have been resurrected.

They'd call it a miracle!

But some of the women will not find their husbands. There will be no angels, no strangers dressed in white, to offer re-assurance. They have no solace, no consolation, no comfort, no happy ending.

No, I don't know how this story ends.

I know only that the 2000-year-old story is being endlessly re-enacted. Somewhere. Every day.

Prayer

Fear and death flow about their feet

as the first preachers plod
towards the finality of stone and grave.
The angels speak their peace and hope rises.
A gardener, who is not a gardener, speaks a name,
and their re-cognition turns fear into hope;
finality into resurrection.
Before the sun is up, the tomb is empty,
and they flee with terror and joy.
Then heavy of breath and alight with love
their first fear fuelled sermon begins:
Christ is risen.
Easter joy begins in the grip of chaos and fear.
Yet it is hope that rises in the darkness before the dawn.
The first sermons whisper on the wind:
He is risen indeed!

Blessing

The stone is rolled away!
Death is overcome!
Jesus is alive, and all is well!
Halleluiah, halleluiah, Christ is risen!

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