

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/2GQPpWEX1Wo>

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.**

**In this Easter Season of new life and new hope,
may the light of this candle remind us that light and life have the
victory over death and darkness**

Blessed—that is us, isn't it?
We did not see and yet here we are, trying our best not to be Thomas.
But hang on... is that right?
We have not seen and yet believe? Have we had our eyes closed?

All around us is the evidence.
The Scriptures.
The Easter Story still fresh in our thoughts.
The visible structures pointing to the man Jesus, (yes, I mean the
churches and cathedrals),
the art work,
the music,
the libraries of theological books,
the great writings of Church Mothers and Fathers
the list goes on and on....

But not just the physical evidence, the things we can touch,
there is more, much more.
There is love in action,

there is the welcome,
there is the community,
there is us!

Each one of us a pointer to something bigger.

Okay, we were not the ones who walked with Jesus on those dusty roads
2000 years ago.
Instead we walk today's paths and roads,
pointing the way for others.

Those who do not believe are blessed by our presence. We are the
blessing as
we have been blessed by others.
We did not see but we are both blessed and a blessing. Incredible.

Wonderful. Beyond imagining.

Reading

Luke 24: 13-31

That same day, two of the disciples were making their way to a village called Emmaus—which was about seven miles from Jerusalem— discussing all that had happened as they went. While they were discussing these things, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them, though they were kept from recognizing Jesus, who asked them, "What are you two discussing as you go your way?" They stopped and looked sad. One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these past few days?" Jesus said to them, "What things?" They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people— how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the One who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today—the third day since these things happened—some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and didn't find the body; they returned and informed us that they had seen a vision of angels, who declared that Jesus was alive. Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but they didn't find Jesus." Then Jesus said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Didn't the Messiah have to undergo all this to enter into glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of scripture which referred to the Messiah. By now they were near the village they were going to, and Jesus appeared to be going further. But they said eagerly, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening—the day is practically over." So the savior went in and stayed with them. After sitting down with them to eat, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately vanished from their sight.

Reflection

Wormwood is an apprentice devil in C S Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. In this delightful book the reader is told of Wormwood's trials and tribulations as he learns how to tempt a human soul. His uncle, Screwtape, as the Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary of the hellish dominions,

writes to advise his nephew how to tighten the noose on his hapless victim.

But in the end the temptation goes wrong. Screwtape exclaims, "You have let a soul slip through your fingers ... It makes me mad to think of it."

He agonises that "... this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself ..."

At last the man is released from the restrictions of his human nature and sees clearly what he has before only been able to guess at.

The theme of a hidden God is ancient, featured in countless folk tales and myths. One such is from Ovid, a Roman poet who lived about the same time as Jesus. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells how two men unwittingly entertain Jupiter and Mercury with the best hospitality their poor means can manage. Only when the jar of wine is miraculously replenished do they recognise the two gods for who they really are.

The same theme occurs in the Old Testament. Abraham entertains three men. When two leave to go to Sodom, the third stays and is finally recognised as YHWH. The author of the letter to the Hebrews appears familiar with the theme. He writes, "Remember to welcome strangers in your homes. There were some who did that and welcomed angels without knowing it".

The author of Luke's Gospel in today's reading tells a similar tale. True to the folk story, two travellers to Emmaus fail to recognise Jesus until he shares a meal with them. Jesus vanishes the moment they realise who he is.

The divine isn't easy to recognise. It's a "still, small voice" which has to be listened for with the greatest of care. We somehow know that God's presence is with us, and yet are frustrated by not being able to see the divine clearly. Most of the time it's as though we glimpse the presence out of the corner of an eye - here one moment and gone the next.

Folk-tales of the past, charming and in many ways instructive, don't carry the weight they once did. Today many feel cut off from visions of the Spirit. It's as though however hard we try, we fail to recognise the presence in ordinary, everyday experience. We often feel blind and deaf to the divine in our tough, materialistic, scientific world.

Some have tried philosophical arguments to "prove" that God exists. Their answers turn out to be nice brain teasers but otherwise almost useless. Some try to turn back the clock as though little or nothing has changed in two millennia and that the old tales still have a punch. Others shrug and go about their business, declaring that bothering about God is a waste of time.

A large part of the attraction of Jesus seems to have been his clear and certain vision of God. His relatives and neighbours wondered where he got it from. But how does that help us today, two thousand years later? We are not now so fortunate as to have him to sharpen our blurred sight.

No, there are no neat answers. God doesn't appear to us as a full-blown vision. That never has been and never will be. To Christians, the person of Jesus is recognised as *Emmanuel*, the Hebrew word for "God is with us". If anyone wants to know what God is like, say Christian sages, then the vision of Jesus is enough.

But is Jesus enough? He's long-dead - and unless one perceives the world as somehow in contact with a supernatural dimension, only a shadowy historical figure is left with us today.

The truth is much more challenging. It is, I think, that our understandings of God are very limited. God is unknowable by us, quite literally beyond our ken.

If that is true, then the words of the sages come back to us. If we want to see/know/ understand God within our very limited human experience - valuable as it is- then look at the life and teachings of Jesus. Look at and value this wonderful creation of which we are but a small part. God has as many faces as the people we meet. The divine lies deep in the heart of each us, if we will only search and sharpen our awareness. The Spirit of God, [remember - known as the Helper-] nestles both in the immensely large and in the almost infinitely small aspects of nature. The Spirit may come to us unannounced, or may have to be sought after with determination.

Recognising and attempting to harmonise ourselves with the divine is, if Jesus, Paul and a host of Christians are to be believed, the point of human life. The rest of nature does this automatically. We, on the other hand, must freely choose to do it.

Prayer

Each of us walks our own Emmaus Road. Some seem to have an easy route, for others it is a bumpy, twisty, uneven road. And so for them we pray this day.

For those who are ill and see no end in sight for their pain, we pray for healing
and for a sense that the Spirit is there with them.

For those who face financial difficulties and see no end to their problems we pray for solutions and for a sense that the Spirit is there with them

For those who struggle to put food on the table and see no end date to their empty cupboards we pray for fairness and a sense that the Spirit is there with them.

For those who are caring for loved ones and see no end to their fatigue we pray for rest and a sense that the Spirit is there with them.

For those who struggle with the daily juggle of responsibilities and see no end to their merry-go-round life, we pray for moments of stillness and a sense that the Spirit is there with them.

So many people, so many challenges, it is often difficult for us to know where to begin. May we take each situation as it comes, know what the priorities are, work out the ways in which we can help.
And may the Spirit help us to stick to your path of righteousness, justice and peace, in all we say and do.

Blessing

Their ears were blocked, their minds were dull,
and then they knew!
As we have worshipped
so we too go out into the world, our hearts burning,
ready to share the Good News: Jesus is risen!

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

