

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/re6_zwQNHUA

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.

Corncrake and skylark, oystercatcher and fulmar, cry plaintively on the wind.

Scottish Heather orchid, buttercup Daisy and wild thyme beseech as well.

These softly, so softly, so very softly, do these flowers speak.

That you and I must fall to our knees. Draw close. So close.

As we might were we to wash their feet.
That we might hear, hear fully the whispers of their suffering song.

Foamy seas murmur along the far machair,
Sand and cobble strand marking the very edge of the world.
Bearing the call and cry of every wave of all the world's seas wind driven, wind
borne.

You and I, do we not hear? Do we know it hear?
Do you not hear the voice of creation calling, nay, sobbing, weeping.
Weeping borne on the wind, each bird, flower, wave of the broad seas.
A voice, each in its own way. And as a gathered single voice. The voice of Rachel
weeping.

Rachel weeping for our children. Earth, water, air.
She calls in her, anguished weeping. To you and to me.

Oh, my children. Save, O save these, My children. Earth, water, air.
She weeps. Save these. These are my children.

You and I, do we not hear her weeping? You and I, do we not hear?

Reading
Matthew 22:34-46

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 neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law is based—and the Prophets as well."

While the Pharisees were gathered around him, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant is the Messiah?" They said, "David's." Then Jesus asked, "Then how is it that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls the Messiah 'Sovereign'? For he says, 'The Most High said to my Sovereign, "Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your foot.'" "If David calls the Messiah 'Sovereign,' how can the Messiah be a descendant of David?" No one could reply, and from that day on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Reflection

Sometimes our greatest breach with Scripture is not when we outright contradict it—it's what we choose to prioritise, diminish or outright ignore. There is a time for everything under heaven. We need to put first things first and second things second.

Much of Christianity focuses on salvation plans and doctrinal ideas. However, Jesus in full voice in Scripture is very clear what we should prioritize: It is the *Greatest Commandment*, i.e. love God and love one another.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law is based—and the Prophets as well"

The last line there hits us like a bullet: All the Law and the Prophets are based on these two commandments. This is a huge statement. It is a statement that hasn't got anywhere near the attention it deserves. Most Christians are busy arguing about what the Law should be. Jesus is saying there is something bigger, more pivotal and more fundamental than that. The vast traditions of Christian denominations have this absolutely backwards—we try to figure out how to pepper in love and compassion into a rigid structure of rules, doctrines and practices. Jesus is calling our imagination to do the very opposite—to be immersed in the practice of love in which we pepper in rules, doctrines and practices to give it form and ornamentation when appropriate.

It makes you wonder if we have been reading Scripture at all. Jesus is speaking against a cold, impersonal use for the Law. If there is anything that Jesus railed against during his years walking this earth, it was making a black-and-white interpretation of the Law as the interface between humankind and the Divine. He was constantly railing against the Pharisees with their tedious "gotcha" games with the Law. Jesus clearly put Love and Mercy before any literal interpretation of the Law.

What does it mean that this commandment is the structure on which the Law hangs? I don't even know. I'm not sure that anyone knows. I think it is extremely difficult for our human minds to wrap around. But we also haven't been working very hard to unpack this meaning diligently over the past 2,000 years. Jesus Himself is giving us an enormous clue as to how the whole kit-n-caboodle of Church and society ought to be put together - He's saying the whole thing hangs on the Commandment to love.

When our church makes rules, rubrics and procedures, does it ask: How does this hang off the commandment to love God and one another? How do the 5 marks of Mission measure up to that???? No specific mention.....

Maybe I'm just a simpleton at heart, but it just seems straightforward.

The reason is simple: Jesus said that Love is more than just a part of the Law. He said that Love is the structure on which all the Law hangs. In other words, all of Law is in relationship with the commandment to Love. Jesus had every opportunity to tell us to scrap the old Law in favour of a new one. He didn't-He told us that the Law will find its fulfilment in relationship with Love-and in that relationship, Law is secondary to Love.

I think Jesus gives us a wide berth here. If the Law hangs on Love, then we can infer some things-that Law can only be something that will not disrupt what Love has put in place. If the Law is too heavy and drags down the structure of Love, then it is out of balance.

Take any Church Law and visualize it this way-imagine it hanging delicately in the balance. It's sole lifeline of support is it's connection to the Commandment to love God and one another. How does that change our view of each and every Church Law?

Jesus was ushering in the Law of Love-something that he proclaimed was at the heart of Jewish Law in the first place but had been scabbed over by centuries of human insecurities and institutions. In short, the Law had become to many a false idol. Fundamentalism is always that-a breaking of the 1st Commandment by making the religious structure an absolute rather than our best attempt to point to God. Jesus was calling us out of making pronouncements without being personally involved and walking side-by-side with people in compassion. He was ushering in the primacy of conscience.

If we build a system of Laws and make room for Love only as an optional ornament, we have a fundamentally different system compared to a system of Love which is only afterwards adorned with Laws-a system where the Laws simply cannot support themselves at all in the absence of Love.

Prayer Rosemary

Creator God, you gave us this world and it was good.

It isn't so good any more.

We admit that we have taken too much for granted. We have assumed too much, wasted too much and not replenished or reinvested. Help us to learn from our indifference and lack of action. To change our habits to be more focused on the common good. For everyone. Everywhere. For justice, fairness and equality. It isn't easy - we've left it too long - but we must make the world a better place for those who need change most.

Father God, we are not an island. We are an island community and in our interconnected and mutually dependent world we have responsibilities. To each other, to the planet and to ourselves. The Jesus Way leads us to serve and comfort. We may not be able to reach the widow who has lost everything in Dnipro, the mother watching her last child die from starvation in Yemen, or to stop the mining of the seabed, but we acknowledge them and so make them part of our prayers, to be acted on however we can help.

Mother God, when times are good for us, we know that you celebrate with us. When times are bad you hold us close. Every step that we take to make things better in this beautiful world, everything we do to comfort, build bridges and support - to share good times and to make bad times better - we know that you are there in every action we take. Help us also to ask for the support that we need, whenever we need it.

Abba God, this world is not black and white. Help us not to hide in the shadows of the greyness of indecision but to follow the Jesus Way to a richer faith in action.
Amen.

Blessing

May the Spirit help us shake the dust off our feet,
and go into the world with a spirit of healing love.
Faith, belief and discipleship are to be lived out.

May we, his followers in this generation, go to meet our world:
with the example of Jesus ever before us, and the energy of the Spirit driving
us.

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