

## **St 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/cEcflMfYEb0>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

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

O Brother Sun, you bring us light, all shining 'round in fiery might.

O Sister Moon, you heal and bless, your beauty shines in tenderness.

O Brother Wind, you sweep the hills, your mighty breath both freshens  
and fills.

O Sister Water, you cleanse and flow through rivers and streams, in ice  
and snow.

O Brother Fire, you warm our night, with all your dancing coloured light.  
O Sister Earth, you feed all things, all birds, all creatures, all scales and  
wings.

O Sister Death, you meet us here and take us to our God so near.  
O God of Life, we give you praise for all your creatures, for all your ways.

Reading  
**MATTHEW 28: 16-20**

The Eleven made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had  
summoned them. At the sight of the risen Christ they fell down in  
homage, though some doubted what they were seeing. Jesus came  
forward and addressed them in these words: "All authority has been given  
me  
both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the  
nations. Baptise them in the name of Abba God, and of the Only Begotten,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have  
commanded you. And know that I am with you always, even until the end  
of the world!"

Reflection

Christianity is great, but not everything we say or believe about it is  
necessarily true. So today I thought I would explore with you some of the  
more common stereotypes that Christians or more importantly others,  
have about Christianity that maybe need challenged.

**You're Always Happy:**

There's an unhealthy expectation within many faith communities that  
we're always supposed to be joyful, as if being anything other than a  
smiling, peaceful, and jolly spiritual cheerleader is detrimental to  
Christianity.

"Being a good witness" is often the Christian way of saying, "act the part." But while contentment and happiness is a spiritual virtue, it should never come at the expense of honesty, transparency, and truthfulness. We shouldn't pretend to be happy and use the facade of joy as an evangelism tool.

The Way of Christ teaches reconciliation and renewal, and this often means confronting broken relationships and dealing with wrongdoing within our lives. Asking for forgiveness, admitting addiction, confronting abuse, seeking justice, requesting help, and serving others often makes you the opposite of happy — and that's OK.

There's a season for everything, and some of life's most important, loving, and holy moments are times of trial, sorrow, and sadness — so let's stop trying to turn Christianity into something it was never meant to be.

### **Your Problems Will Disappear:**

Some people use Christianity as a form of escapism, a crutch, and a way to avoid the pain, suffering, and struggles of life. But at the centre of Jesus' life and teaching is (again) the concept of truth. Christianity isn't about ignoring reality but embracing it, engaging the real world and all the baggage that comes with it.

In many ways, following Jesus causes us to accept — and confront — the facts, whether they are good or bad. We shouldn't hide or pretend or ignore difficulties but address them.

A faith in Christ requires honesty and bravery, and it demands sacrifice, service, and heartbreak. The New Testament shows us that Jesus' disciples faced even more problems when they decided to follow him: persecution, poverty, and ultimately martyrdom.

No, our problems won't disappear, but a relationship with Christ' spirit is worth the accompanying struggles that may come with it.

### **You'll Be "Blessed":**

If you're seeking wealth, prosperity, comfort, and security, Christianity isn't the place to go.

Contrary to our consumer tendencies, Jesus' teachings continually instruct believers to sacrifice and be willing to give everything away for

the sake of loving others. The disciples of Jesus lived a dangerous and hard life that continually relied on the hospitality and generosity of others. They often ended up in jail or were even killed because of their faith.

Disease, sickness, poverty, crime, abuse, and a litany of other horrible things happen to good people — even Christians.

Does this mean that they don't trust enough or aren't being good Christians? No! Our faith isn't a pathway toward gaining an array of physical, financial, or social blessings — it's not a formula for worldly success, so let's stop treating it like one.

### **All Your Questions Will Be Answered:**

Christianity is full of doubt, uncertainty, nuance, and complexity. There are very few clear answers, and the ones that exist are debated among hundreds of theologians. For those seeking resolutions to life's deepest questions and mysteries, Christianity will provide some clarity, but ultimately it leaves much to the imagination.

As followers, we need to start accepting the fact that we don't know everything. When we try to turn the Bible into a set of answers to all of the world's challenges and questions, we end up manipulating the message of Christ and forming it into our own agendas just to appease our curiosity or quell the objections of others.

### **The Christian Community Is Great:**

Many people leave the Christian faith not because they hate Jesus, but because they hate the people who represent him. Christians hurt people. They fight, argue, yell, scream, and do horrible things.

Nobody knows this better than Christians themselves, who routinely suffer through denominational splits, church infighting, community gossip, and an avalanche of interpersonal conflicts.

Christians aren't better than anyone else. The divorce rates, crime rates, and other "moral" comparative data show little difference between them and the rest of the world. So let's stop pretending Christians have the market corner on what's right and wrong.

We need to start listening and talking with others instead of self-righteously judging and convicting others. There's a reason why you can't look across a mall and point out who's a Christian and who isn't — because there's no noticeable difference.

### **It Makes You Better Than Others:**

This is the hardest truth for Christians to swallow, that they aren't any better than anyone else. In fact, Jesus continually tried to instil the virtues of humility and humbleness throughout his ministry, repeatedly trying to teach his followers that everyone was loved, regardless of social, financial, or spiritual status.

When we see ourselves as superior, we become like the Pharisees, who craved power and control and authority. But Jesus made himself nothing, and died on a cross for the sake of others — for the sake of those who were in the process of murdering him! Are we willing to become nothing for the sake of others, even for those we dislike?

The problem with romanticizing Christianity is that we turn our faith into a product, using various selling points to make it look more attractive. It's not that the above headlines are entirely false, it's just that Christians publicise them as being entirely true. This creates false expectations and idols, and inevitably leads to disappointment and sense of failure.

Instead of promoting Christianity as a set of benefits, we need to promote Christ. In the end, when everything else fails and falls short, Jesus will remain faithful through it all. We can trust him above any form of religion we attempt to turn Christianity into.

### **Prayer**

This world can make us doubt.  
When we see the starving child or the homeless man, when we imagine the  
plight of the abused women or the fleeing refugee  
this world can make us doubt.

This world can make us tired.  
When news is 24/7 of plight and pain and poverty, when leaders say and  
do  
what we'd reprimand our children for,  
when the needs keep on coming

and the challenges keep on challenging.  
This world can make us tired.

What can this world make us learn? When there are naked to be clothed,  
imprisoned who should be free, when there are thirsty needing water,  
what can this world make us learn?

This world can make us love! When the outcast is left isolated, when the  
infirm are forgotten, when the anxious are misunderstood, this world can  
make us love.

May the Spirit teach us then. Teach us all to go!  
To preach the Good News.  
To be the Good News.

With love, with courage, in service.

### Blessing

Go with God's blessing  
to be disciples, and to make disciples.  
Not knowing all the answers,  
not promising to give all the answers;  
but content to know, and confirm to others,  
that God is present,  
in all the mix of certainty and doubt that is human life.

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