

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/cF4_QhqvTMI

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

**We light this candle, symbol of the Light within us and around us.
May this gathering for worship enlighten our hearts and our minds
and our souls.**

**And may the Inner Light of the Spirit be kindled by our time
together.**

What welcome shall we offer
that opens grace and justice between us

What creativity shall we set free
that give new life to us all

What relationships shall we invite
that offer love to all our neighbours

What space shall we open
for every generation of our family

What compassion shall we give
for each person wellbeing and growth

What stories shall we tell
that communicates and shapes love's message

What kind of community are we building
here and wherever we are?

Come and see.

Reading

Matthew 20; 1-16

Jesus said to his listeners.. "The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of an estate who went out at dawn to hire workers for the vineyard. After reaching an agreement with them for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them out to the vineyard. "About mid-morning, the owner came out and saw others standing around the marketplace without work, and said to them, 'You go along to my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is fair.' At that they left. "Around noon and again in the mid-afternoon, the owner came out and did the same. Finally, going out late in the afternoon, the owner found still others standing around and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' " 'No one has hired us,' they replied.

"The owner said, 'You go to my vineyard, too.' "When evening came, the owner said to the overseer, 'Call the workers and give them their pay, but begin with the last group and end with the first.' When those hired late in the afternoon came up, they received a full day's pay, and when the first group appeared they assumed they would get more. Yet they all received the same daily wage. "Thereupon they complained to the owner, 'This last group did only an hour's work, but you've put them on the same basis as those who worked a full day in the scorching heat.' " 'My friends,' said the owner to those who voiced this complaint, 'I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, didn't you? Take your pay and go home. I intend to give this worker who was hired last the same pay as you. I'm free to do

as I please with my money, aren't I? Or are you envious because I am generous?' "Thus the last will be first and the first will be last."

Reflection

This is part five in a series exploring the centrality to Christian faith of what we have traditionally called the *Greatest Commandment*.

When Jesus said, "The last shall be first and the first shall be last," I highly doubt He meant that the first and *Greatest Commandment* should be the last thing on our list of things to do.

If you run a successful business, you are probably centred on a mission. You evaluate everything you do in light of that mission. Knowing human nature, you have to be reminded of it time and again, to make sure it stays front and centre.

You might distil that mission into a motto and share it on bumper stickers, placards hanging on doors and anywhere else eye-worthy.

Great businesses keep their eyes on the ball.

Jesus told us in all four *Gospels*:

We are to love *God* and neighbour abundantly.

Jesus gave many commands throughout the *Gospels*, but this one is called the "*Greatest*" for a reason--Jesus actually said this was primary.

Being loving is not just a collection of isolated actions.

Love is not just something we tack onto our other actions.

Rather, Jesus tells us that Love is the essential infrastructure on which all the other rules and parameters hang, as we explored in the previous post. We ought to put it first and then re-order everything else in light of it.

If what we do isn't loving *God* and neighbour, we should seriously question why we are doing it at all.

We should immediately give some serious thought to what else we should be doing instead.

Before we do anything and everything, the question that should be forever on our lips from the moment we wake till we bed down to sleep at night is:

Are we loving God and loving neighbour in what we do?

We should be researching, compiling lists, best practices.
It should be out front and open.

There should be study groups at every church on how to love God and love one another.

I've been in and to a lot of churches and I have yet to see a "Greatest Commandment Ministry Group."

In response to that, I find myself asking:
What part of "Greatest" and "Commandment" are we not understanding?

A "commandment" is what it sounds like--a command.

And "greatest" is also pretty self-explanatory.
I'm really not sure where the confusion is here.

I don't mean to be insolent, but is this not really simple.
This is one of the reasons why Jesus said that children will get it but adults may not--why the poor will get it but the rich won't.

There is nothing intellectually difficult about the Greatest Commandment.

It is the centrepiece around which all else should be built, it is the structure on which the Law should hang and it should be our primary focus as disciples and as church communities.

It is the sign of our Christian identity.

Unfortunately, religion--for all its benefits--can often train people to doubt their own childlike wisdom and common sense.

It becomes a way to dumb us down rather than open us up to the Mystery.

What makes The Greatest Commandment difficult is our enormous resistance to its message.

It is enormously simple.

It is also enormously difficult.
It takes spiritual maturity to even entertain it.
It requires us having tremendous trust in *God* and letting go of all of our
attachments.

It is so strong it is like looking at the sun--we can only catch a glimpse
and then our bodily reflexes immediately jolt us away.

No sooner do we hear the *Commandment* than we immediately find all
sorts of exceptions and exemptions.
We seize every opportunity to push this commandment away, keep it at
arm's length, minimize it or just put it off for a rainy day.
We hear it but it vibes with a massive cognitive dissonance contrary
to the ways of this world, so we reflexively dismiss it--Jesus couldn't
possibly have meant that, right?
It's so different, it's just--out of this world....

You could easily say you're tired of me complaining.

You could call me out on this.

Each time in this series this year I've been rambling about how much of
Christianity seems to ignore--or at the very least minimize--the *Greatest*
Commandment to love *God* and one another, something Jesus explicitly
told us to do in all four *Gospels*.

You could say--and rightfully so--that love is indeed preached in the
churches in all that we say and do.

It IS like looking at the sun in that we don't look at it directly, but it
does illuminate everything we do.

You could say that all we do flows out of love: Our worship is a love for
God.

Our social justice and charity efforts come out of desire to love our
neighbour.

You would be hard pressed to find any positive movement for mercy and
justice that did not showcase the church right in the middle of it, often
starting the whole movement.

Love is everywhere in the churches, you could say.

We may not have a "Greatest Commandment" ministry group, but we do contribute to the food bank, run a community centre, offer hospitality by showing our love for God through worship, and fundraise for our Malawian partners and so on.....

We do however have to be aware that those who put in the hard yards, organising, cleaning, turning up, fundraising, are not marginalised by the rest of us as do gooders.

There probably is some truth that these saintly people are instruments in the redemption of their respective communities—but redemption and reconciliation are not exclusively individual affairs.

That should not be an excuse for the rest of us to sit idly by and then claim the credit.

Prayer

Our celebration of word and life
is always incomplete if we forget other people.

So our hearts reach out in love
to all whose experience of the word
has been shaped in the harshness of life.
We think of those who are continually downtrodden,
men and women sitting at the pavement
watching others pass by,
people oppressed by the success of others,
and all who in their weakness
are regarded as the flotsam of life.

We remember today all who find themselves
between rocks and hard places,
young and older folk with decisions to make,
who find the gathering of facts and
the weighing of consequence far beyond them,
who live with the regret of past choices
and have no confidence for the future.

Our world is increasingly confrontational
and significantly hedonistic.

There are many people whose frail grasp of faith
is crushed by the pressure of other ways.
We pray for all who try to find meaning and purpose,
for those who drink at the well of other faiths,
for all who want the sunshine of love
that the Spirit may reach through the shadows and bless them.

We pray that each will achieve their potential of life and love,
that each will be the word for people and nations

Blessing

The Sower, God, spreads the seed in the fertile soil of creation.
We are God's seed. May God's Spirit feed us this week and beyond.
let the earth be full of God's glory. let all the earth know love.

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