

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[St Magnus Cathedral Facebook page](#)

Minister: Rev Fraser Macnaughton Tel: 873312
FMacnaughton@churchofscotland.org.uk
Pastoral Minister: Rev. June Freeth Tel: 721449
JFreeth@churchofscotland.org.uk

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 on Facebook](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or [on YouTube here](#)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

It is God, in the dawning, in the renewal, in the arrival, in the new day.
We carry this flame into our midst as the symbol of the creativity of our
faith:

For everything there is a season under the sun: Now, a time to pause, to breathe deeply, pray and centre upon the things and people and issues in our lives. We take them on more passionately and we may also let them go. We are surrounded by and part of the rhythms of nature: The crinkling, browning leaves both amazing and perhaps already annoying us; the

preparation of harvest and beautiful bounty of this land; crisp, fresh mornings and children remarking how they can even see their breath! On it all goes, the changes of schedules, paces, actions and minds. No matter who we are, what we believe or deny, might we abide in the experience of the infinite, with any God and life presence of our understandings within, between or beyond - that may be a soft affirmation saying: Even with all our mistakes, our base humanity, our animal nature, our dis-ordered-ness...we are beautiful and unique; we are important in this world with our individuality, our important decision making, our unmatched character. We are every day on the way toward something greater and more mature...feeling and causing less suffering. May the beauty of this season inspire us to be more of who we are and to be engaged in this hurting and hopeful world.

Reading Habakkuk 1; 1-11

THE ORACLE THAT HABAKKUK THE PROPHET
RECEIVED IN A VISION.

"How long, Yahweh, am I to cry for help while you do not listen?
How long will I cry 'Oppression!' in your ear and you do not save? Why do
you make me look upon injustice? Why do you countenance tyranny?

Outrage and violence—this is all I see!

All is contention, and discord flourishes. The law loses its hold, and
justice never shows itself. The corrupt triumph over those who are
righteous, and justice is perverted once again."

"Cast your eyes over the nations, take a look, and be amazed, astonished.
For I am doing something in your days that you would not believe even if a
messenger came and told you. For now I am stirring up the Chaldeans,
that fierce and fiery people who march miles across the country to seize
the houses of others— a people feared and dreaded:

their 'might makes right'; they make their own rules. Their horses are
swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves in the dark; their cavalry
gallop on, their cavalry fly from afar, like eagles swooping down to catch
their food. All of them come for plunder, all of them,
their faces scorching us like an east wind; they scoop up prisoners like
sand. They are a people that scoff at rulers and mock at leaders. They
laugh at fortresses and raise siegeworks to capture them. Then the wind
changes and they are gone; they ascribe their strength to their gods."

Reflection

If God is God, then how can we forgive him or her for not using his or her powers to spare us from the misery and pain this life often brings? If he/she is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, as Christians have claimed over the ages, then how can we forgive him /her for not using her/his powers to rid the world of misery, pain and untimely death?

Some will recognize this dilemma as the problem of to use the technical term...theodicy. In his famous book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981), Rabbi Harold Kushner summed up this problem with the following statement:

"We can't pray that God makes our lives free of problems; this won't happen and it's probably just as well."

This is the story of one person's struggle with this whole idea. 'My first experience with the problem of theodicy occurred when I was just eleven years old. One Sunday afternoon, my family and I set out in the family car for the home of an elderly couple in our church who were housebound. As an Elder in the church, my dad had been dispatched to provide the service of Communion to these shut-ins. As we approached the town where the couple lived, we made a tragic left turn in front of two lanes of on-coming traffic, and our car was hit broadside by a very heavy car that was traveling at a high rate of speed. My mother, who was sitting in the front seat on the passenger side of our car, was gravely injured and only lived for about forty-five minutes after the collision. As it turned out, I was the only member of my immediate family who was well enough to attend her memorial service. Trying to comfort me as I viewed my mother's coffin, my aunt, told me that God loved her so much that he wanted her to come to Heaven and be with him. My mother was a lovely person, so I could understand why God might want her to be with him, but my aunt's reassurances did not help. They only made me angry with God. And the question that I could not get out of my mind was, "Why did you take her, God?"

The question that afternoon was but one in the millions of similar queries that have reverberated down through the centuries. Even the most cursory review of history reveals tragic afflictions visited upon human beings that a caring, all-powerful God should have prevented. The brave martyrs who died in the Coliseum as they were being eaten alive by wild

animals; the serfs of the Dark Ages, who lived in misery and hopelessness for a thousand years; the proud Africans who suffered the dehumanizing misery and degradation of slavery, for four hundred years; the millions of Jews who were tortured, starved or incinerated in the Holocaust and, currently, the innocent Ukrainians, whose lives have been shattered by the brutal aggression of their Russian neighbours, all suggest that God is either indifferent to, or unable to, relieve human suffering.

Is there really any reliable evidence that there is a God who provides this kind of care.

I should add, however, that these unresolved questions of theodicy need not necessarily lead to Atheism. Observing that there doesn't appear to be a God who provides reliable providential care for us does not mean, in and of itself, that there is no Ultimate. Nor does it mean that there is no place for prayer in our lives.

Starting as far back as the Ancient Greeks, scholars of communication have identified two broad categories of speech that might be useful. They have observed that most human utterances fall somewhere on a continuum that ranges from those that are mainly instrumental to those that are primarily consummatory.

Instrumental communication is designed to effect change, where the consummatory forms achieve their purpose simply upon being consumed, which is to say by being uttered or received.

So for example, most political speech is instrumental, in that it seeks to gain support for a political position, or for a candidate who is running for some office. Consummatory forms are affective, rather than instrumental; their main purpose is to express and evoke feelings. Examples of consummatory speech are found in therapy, poetry, theatre, oral interpretation of literature and the arts generally. It seems self-evident that people can distinguish between asking and expressing feelings. It is one thing to say, "God save the people of Ukraine" and quite another to say, "Our hearts ache for the people of the Ukraine." Would it not be more healthy, and certainly a lot more honest, for us to understand prayer as affective, rather than as instrumental? Even though we may not be able to control the actions of the Ultimate through our prayers, we can still use them to express our hopes, our fears, and our gratitude.

Humans are nothing if not emotional, so using our prayers to express our feelings allows us to share them with others and, thus, brings us closer together as communities of people who care.

Prayer

We are mindful of neighbours near and far. We remember friends and family we love who are struggling; we pray and mindfully love those needing encouragement and relief -whether from storms of nature or of any transition or loss.

We extend our best energy and care to leaders making crucial decisions about war, exit strategies, health care, education and programmes that tend to the most vulnerable in our communities. We affirm that we are all connected; mindful of individual and collective collaboration and collusion with all that is good and oppressive in this world, we suffer and benefit together.

We value others' perspectives and realize that we do not know it all. May we recognize our emotions - how they direct and distract, learn facts, follow our passions, and live out our values in the face of it all. We are community - and all are welcome. We abide side by side with each other and affirm both the questions and the answers.

Blessing

Let us go now as those who would see not only what the world is
but what we can make it be,
and may our hands, our hearts, our voices
be turned toward making it so. We go in peace.

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