

## **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](mailto:FMacnaughton@churchofscotland.org.uk)**  
Pastoral Minister: Rev. June Freeth Tel: 721449  
[JFreeth@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:JFreeth@churchofscotland.org.uk)

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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 on Facebook](#)

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

or [on YouTube here](#)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

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

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

We light this flame to remind ourselves that We are one with the universe.

We are one with the sun and the stars.

We are one with the earth.

We are one with the One who is mystery...

As the Great Dynamo who powers the wheels of seasons and years

Turns autumn once more into winter,

At this season of Thanksgiving,

We give thanks for all seasons.

For autumn and its slow growing fruition  
For that season of ultimate rise and fall  
We give thanks.

May we gracefully rise to the occasion of our own falling,  
Giving ourselves just enough time to go beyond time  
To the great Now  
At the quiet centre of the turning wheels.

For winter, who strips trees to their basic design,  
For stark, minimalist winter,  
We give thanks.

May we let go, and grow bright as stars in a clear, frosty night,  
The more we are stripped of what we thought we could not do without.

For the springtime that bursts forth,  
Just when we think winter will never end,  
For irrepressible springtime  
We give thanks.

May we never forget the crippled, wind-beaten trees,  
How they, too, bud, green and bloom,  
May we, too, take courage to bloom where we are planted.

For summer, when fruit begins to ripen more and more,  
For the green, swelling high tide of summer  
We give thanks.

May we trust that time is not running out, but coming to fulfilment,  
May we wait patiently while time ripens.

We give thanks for all seasons  
At this season of Thanksgiving.

#### Reading Luke 14

Large crowds followed Jesus. He turned to them and said, "If any of you come to me without turning your back on your mother and your father, your loved ones, your sisters and brothers, indeed your very self, you can't be my follower. Anyone who doesn't take up the cross and follow me can't be my disciple. "If one of you were going to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the outlay to see if you have enough

money to complete the project? You'd do that for fear of laying the foundation and then not being able to complete the work—because anyone who saw it would jeer at you and say, 'You started a building and couldn't finish it.' Or if the leaders of one country were going to declare war on another country, wouldn't they first sit down and consider whether, with an army of ten thousand, they could win against an enemy coming against them with twenty thousand? If they couldn't, they'd send a delegation while the enemy is still at a distance, asking for terms of peace.

### Reflection

The battle between emotional and rational networks in the brain is nicely illustrated by an old episode of the TV show, *The Twilight Zone*. This was a show where Ordinary people find themselves in extraordinarily astounding situations, which they each try to solve in a remarkable manner.

From memory, but the plot in this particular episode goes something like this: A stranger in an overcoat shows up at a man's door and proposes a deal. 'Here is a box with a single button on it. All you have to do is press the button and I will pay you a thousand dollars.'

" 'What happens when I press the button?' the man asks.

"The stranger tells him, 'When you press the button, someone far away, someone you don't even know, will die.'

"The man suffers over the moral dilemma through the night. The button box rests on his kitchen table. He stares at it. He paces around it. Sweat clings to his brow.

"Finally, after an assessment of his desperate financial situation, he lunges to the box and punches the button. Nothing happens. It is quiet and anticlimactic.

"Then there is a knock at the door. The stranger in the overcoat is there, and he hands the man the money and takes the box. 'Wait,' the man shouts after him. 'What happens now?'

"The stranger says, 'Now I take the box and give it to the next person. Someone far away, someone you don't even know.'

The story highlights the ease of impersonally pressing a button: if the man had been asked to attack someone with his hands, he presumably would have declined the bargain.

In earlier times in our evolution, there was no real way to interact with others at a distance any farther than that allowed by hands, feet, or possibly a stick. That distance of interaction was salient and consequential, and this is what our emotional reaction reflects. In modern times, the situation differs: generals and even soldiers commonly find themselves far removed from the people they kill. In Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 2*, the rebel Jack Cade challenges Lord Say, mocking the fact that he has never known the firsthand danger of the battlefield: 'When struck'st thou one blow in the field?' Lord Say responds, 'Great men have reaching hands: oft have I struck those that I never saw and struck them dead.'

In modern times, we can launch forty Tomahawk surface-to-surface missiles from the deck of navy ships in the Mediterranean or Red Seas with the touch of a button. The result of pushing that button may be watched by the missile operators live on TV, minutes later, when a city's buildings disappear in plumes. The proximity is lost, and so is the emotional influence.

This impersonal nature of waging war makes it disconcertingly easy. Drone warfare as witnessed in Ukraine takes this even a step further.

In the 1960s, one political thinker suggested that the button to launch a nuclear war should be implanted in the chest of the President's closest friend. That way, should the President want to make the decision to annihilate millions of people on the other side of the globe, he would first have to physically harm his friend, ripping open his chest to get to the button. That would at least engage his emotional system in the decision making, so as to guard against letting the choice be impersonal.

Because both of the neural systems battle to control the single output channel of behaviour, emotions can tip the balance of decision making.

This ancient battle has turned into a directive of sorts for many people: *If it feels bad, it is probably wrong*. There are many counter examples to this (for example, one may find oneself put off by another's sexual preference but still deem nothing morally wrong with that choice), but emotion nonetheless serves as a generally useful steering mechanism for decision making.

The emotional systems are evolutionarily old, and therefore shared with many other species, while the development of the rational system is more recent. But as we have seen, the novelty of the rational system does not necessarily indicate that it is, by itself, superior.

Societies would *not* be better off if everyone were like Mr. Spock, all rationality and no emotion. Instead, a balance — a teaming up of the internal rivals — is optimal for brains. This is because the disgust we feel at pushing the man off the footbridge is critical to social interaction; the impassivity one feels at pressing a button to launch a cruise missile is detrimental to civilization. Some balance of the emotional and rational systems is needed, and that balance may already be optimized by natural selection in human brains. To put it another way, a democracy split across the aisle may be just what you want — a takeover in either direction would almost certainly prove less optimal.

The ancient Greeks had an analogy for life that captured this wisdom: you are a charioteer, and your chariot is pulled by two thunderous horses, the white horse of reason and the black horse of passion. The white horse is always trying to tug you off one side of the road, and the black horse tries to pull you off the other side. Your job is to hold on to them tightly, keeping them in check so you can continue down the middle of the road.

### Prayer

We give thanks for our faith, and pray for all who struggle in the work of the gospel, We pray for a gentleness and graciousness in our mission and outreach. We remember those who work among the outcasts and the poor

We pray for all troubled areas of the world, that wars may cease and that we may find a lasting peace. We pray for the peacemakers of our world. We remember all who have suffered through war, all who have been injured, all who have lost loved ones. We pray for those whose memories are scarred by violence

We pray for all who are distressed, for the over-anxious and the fearful, for the troubled in body, mind or spirit, for all who are over-tense or uptight, for all who find it hard to relax or let go. We pray for all whose peace is disturbed by the violence or carelessness of others. We pray that we all may know the presence of God and the peace it offers.

Blessing

We go into the seething cauldron of the world.  
Listen for the questions and voices that we would rather not hear.  
Answer them with the energy of the Holy Spirit,  
the power of the One who gives us life,  
and the boundless love of Christ.

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