

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[St Magnus Cathedral Facebook page](#)

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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 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

Let there be light, let there be understanding, let all the nations gather together face to face leading to peace on earth. Let there be light.

Come and find the quiet centre in the crowded life we lead,
Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed;
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see
All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.

In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,

Let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain:
There's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming there is always room to spare!

Reading

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

From Paul, Silas and Timothy to the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to Abba God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be yours. We always thank God for all of you and remember you in our prayers. We call to mind before our God and Creator how you are proving your faith by your actions, labouring in love, and showing constancy of hope in our Saviour Jesus Christ. We know, sisters and brothers beloved of God, that you have been chosen. Our preaching of the Gospel was not a mere matter of words. It was done in the power of the Holy Spirit and with complete conviction. You know very well the sort of life we led when we were with you, which was for your sake. You, in turn, followed the example set by us and by Jesus—receiving the word, despite great trials, with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. In this way, you've become a model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The word of Christ has been resounding from you—and not only in Macedonia and Achaia: the news of your faith in God is celebrated everywhere, which makes it unnecessary for us to say anything more. They themselves report to us what kind of reception we had among you, how you turned from idols to God, to be faithful witnesses of the living and true God, and to await the appearance from heaven of Jesus, the Only Begotten, whom God raised from the dead and who will deliver us from the wrath to come.

Reflection

The exasperated cry of a parent, "Do as I tell you," must be familiar to us all. If you're anything like me, you'll recall the sense of anger you experienced as a child or teenager when you heard the refrain. And if you're a parent, you'll probably know how a teenager can look at you as though you're a species from another planet.

Reflecting on the times I've used the same phrase with my children, it occurs to me how often over the years I have unconsciously imitated my parents, how I've done as they told me to. I suddenly become aware of a gesture, a tone of voice, a phrase which catapult me back into the past.

Imitation is, of course, entirely natural to us all. Without the facility to imitate others we wouldn't get off first base in the often harrowing and tortuous process of growing up. Learning language as a child is probably the most fundamental imitation of them all.

I suspect, however, that the natural gift of imitation through which we learn to be human isn't what Paul meant when he points out that the Thessalonian Christians had imitated how he, Silas and Timothy lived when they were with them and had in turn become a model for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

When Paul talks of being an "example" for others to imitate, he is saying that he and other leaders had a God-given right to be imitated. He maintains that the right is initiated and preserved "with power and the Holy Spirit, with complete conviction of its truth." In other words, it comes straight from God.

Paul was putting his finger on a basic aspect of the culture in which he and the first Christians all lived - an aspect which is well on the way to disappearing in the West today. They thought of a hierarchy of wisdom extending from God downwards through his inspired leaders to us ordinary followers. In such a universe, imitation of those above and by definition better than ourselves proves to be a natural course of action.

Thus on the rare occasions Paul talks about personal choice, as in his letter to the Romans, the right thing is to do "what God wants". And, of course, what God wants is what Paul says is right. Paul is unambiguous about this. He often talks about himself as "... an apostle chosen and called by God to preach his good news" and similar phrases. He warns the Galatian Christians that "... if anyone preaches a gospel that is different from the one you accepted [from Paul], may he be condemned to hell!"

As the world of the 21st century is westernised, so this way of perceiving life becomes more and more alienating. Though few of us recognise it, this is because something strange and new (thinking in terms of centuries, that is) has happened to us in the West.

We no longer easily think in terms of imitating wise men and women as a sure way to God. Unlike most people who have preceded us in faith, many of us have adopted an entirely different way of relating to the world. We regard ourselves as not only able to choose for ourselves without reference to a higher authority, but as less of a person if we don't work out our own way ahead in life.

It's not as though we refuse to seek counsel. We do that today more than ever before - through friends, counsellors and other professionals skilled in the art of helping us understand our needs and responsibilities. But we have a diminishing need to imitate others because they claim to have been given the right way by God.

Ask yourself this: If we have a life-choice to make, or if we need to work out what's right or wrong in a tricky personal or social situation, do we automatically seek out God's representatives on earth? And if we do, are we willing to accept their advice or ruling simply because they claim to have a direct line to God?

I think few of us now do what once came naturally to most religious people. Imitation of godly people is no longer a priority for most of us - which is perhaps why so many nowadays have ceased to look to the saints as examples of how to live the Christian life.

In short, autonomy and not imitation is our norm. God is for us no longer a power who determines what and who we should be, but a presence who affirms and supports us in our mature life choices. To put it another way, we're no longer in bondage to the law, the "right way" given by the Church.

Instead, we're free to discover how the Spirit works in the world and to harmonise ourselves with the wonderful working out of universal purpose.

Prayer

Justice.

Where is the justice, in a world where fear trumps hope?

Where is the justice
in a world where,

poor are blamed
for the excesses of the rich?

Where is the justice, in a world where racism runs rampant?

Where is the justice,
in a world where difference is condemned?

Where is the justice,
in a world where,
the abused are blamed
for the crimes of the abuser?

Where is the justice,
in a world where
we stand by and let it happen?

Where is the justice?

May we resolve to play our part in bringing justice
to the world and to show that
Christ's light shines in the darkest times.

Blessing

Go now energised and determined
to model our lives more closely on the Jesus Way.
Empowered to share our faith with all
through simple acts of friendship and caring.

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