



WALKING ST MAGNUS WAY

ORKNEY PILGRIMAGE 2021



Day 2: Friday 14 May
Kirkwall to Stromness



Over land, over sea

Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Jeremiah 6:16 (English Standard Version)

Today I made a journey by bus from Kirkwall to Stromness and back again (for a morning meeting). For pretty much the entire journey it is possible to see both land and water at the same time.

In Orkney the hills are low. Inland lochs, or sea inlets and harbours, break up the landscape. This gives the islands their own particular aesthetic. The land is green, the sea today silver-blue. The land is solid and still, the water ever-moving.

Orkney is a liminal place, and has been for as long as people have lived here. It has its own spiritual feel, that sense that earth and heaven are very close. The visual effect of moving from land to sea to land again is part of this. This is a place where you can make a transition, be changed, be renewed.

Orkney has its own ancient landscape, easily seen from the bus. On the way out of Finstown we passed Maeshowe, and looking across the loch we could see the stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar.



Maeshowe



Ring of Brodgar

These ancient sites were once the places where people came together and expressed in and through these ancient monuments their understanding of the world. They were thinking about the matters that are so important to us – community, life and death, relationship with creation. We do not have much understanding of their world view, if they believed in God, for example. However, it took enormous communal effort to build burial chambers and erect stone circles, so we know whatever they believed they were fully committed.

Next week I will walk close by here, along the ancient pathways. I will be wondering about the women and men who lived here long ago, trying to make sense of their existence. I will be doing the same, inspired by the same beautiful landscape that they saw, but framed for me differently. I will be reflecting and praying from a life shaped by being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Although my faith gives me confidence, I intend to walk humbly, knowing that like those who have gone before much is mystery, and that which I think I know, I only know in part.

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.*