



WALKING ST MAGNUS WAY

ORKNEY PILGRIMAGE 2021



Day 7: Wednesday 19 May *Birsay to Dounby*



Today began where we finished yesterday in Birsay, the old Norse capital of Orkney. We had prayers together next to the Mans Well. This ancient well was where the bones of Magnus were washed after they had been taken from the burial place in Birsay, ready to be carried across land to Kirkwall.

The theme of today's section of the St Magnus Way is 'Growth'. The one leading us today took us through Scripture, prayers and a reflection concerned with abiding in Christ. Only those who are rooted in Christ, abiding in him can grow as Christians, as disciples. We were reminded that abiding was a whole live activity.

Again we were in a beautiful setting, blessed with good weather. Skylarks sang as we prayed, and an enormous hare crossed the field in front of us. Hares are common here, but I cannot remember when I last saw one.

Then we were off again, first along the beach at Birsay, where sand martins were busy making their nests in the sandy cliffs, then over the hill into farming land.



Along our way we came to this 'mansie stone'. Here the bones of Magnus were rested on the stones, rather than rest on the ground.

Other stones cannot be seen now, but their locations are known through place names.

In every direction we could see new life. There are sheep with lambs in many fields, and in others cows with their calves. Fields have been ploughed. Some are newly sown, and there is no germination as yet. Others are showing fresh growth of barley. Everywhere there was a sense of abundant new life, of growth.

Our conversation was mostly concerned with personal growth. We shared our stories of experiences of blessing and challenge. It is a blessing to be in a group of pilgrims where each one is naturally reflective, where each is seeking to make sense of life in the context of their own relationship with Christ. It was often noted that the most challenging events were the ones, with hindsight, that had led to growth. This caused us to be grateful for the whole of life, including those things that at times we would have otherwise.



For a time I walked alone again, praying for the diocese and for growth for all. What was it that I was praying for, what might this look like? We might quickly run to numbers – growth in attendance for example. But this is not sufficient. I remembered the prayers that had started our day, and prayed that we would all grow in our 'abiding'. Only when we are deeply and consistently connected to Christ will the growth we need come to us. How might this be encouraged? Well maybe tomorrow's theme of 'Change' will help me.

The end of today's stage was Dounby, where (praise God!) the hotel was open serving tea and cakes. Spread over two tables indoors, this was the first time for a very long time that most had been inside together with others beyond our family/bubble. We sat there until the hotel closed, telling stories and wondering about how God wants us to be and act. I think we are ready for tomorrow.