

# Forgiveness



At Finstown the Mansie Stane tradition runs out, with only very slight evidence of an overland route to Kirkwall. It is also possible that, rather than traversing the bog or pulling over the hill, the procession travelled by boat from Finstown, past Damsay and round the bay to Kirkwall. The third stage, from Finstown to Orphir, therefore shifts attention to Hakon, Magnus's cousin who ordered his death and ruled the united Earldoms afterwards. He himself made pilgrimage to Jerusalem and it was likely this journey, visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, that inspired the construction of the Round Kirk in Orphir.

Our theme for this stage is Forgiveness – reflecting on whether Hakon was sorry for the murder of Magnus, and our own need to both receive and extend forgiveness.

By all accounts Hakon ruled well, and those who like to cleave sacred and secular argue about whether his penitential pilgrimage was less about faith and more about the political calculations of being seen to be sorry. Motives can be mixed and still lead to an encounter with the transcendent.

Forgiveness matters. Without forgiveness, peace is threatened, loss is magnified, growth is thwarted, change is resisted and hospitality is rejected. In the gospel stories Peter, one of the disciples, asked Jesus how often we should forgive someone. Jesus replied “Seventy times seven” – not a mystical mathematical formula that means no one gets 491 chances or that we stay in a situation of cruelty – but a wisdom teaching that recognises that with forgiveness we can extend it “as often as you need to.”

Forgiveness is only possible when the problem is named. The wrong must be acknowledged by victim, if not perpetrator. With such naming can come anger – the life force of resistance to threat – and mourning over what has been lost. Only then can a move be made beyond the wounding act.

Too often we can be guilt tripped into a superficial forgiving – “it doesn't matter” – that doesn't acknowledge the impact or the depth of pain felt. The pressure to forgive and move on can become itself a further wound. The truth is far more terrifying. We may forgive. We may not. It is a choice. Unforgiveness is an option but liberty will not be found in that space. Peace and healing will be harder to find. Yet still it is a choice we are free to exercise or withhold – with others and ourselves – for sometimes it is ourselves most in need of forgiveness. When Jesus was executed he prayed “Forgive them Father, for they don't know what they're doing.” And we still don't. How often might we forgive? As often as we need to.

## Questions for the journey

- How easy do you find it to say sorry?
- What events in your life do you replay over and over? Is it yourself or others that you struggle to forgive?
- Can you recall a time when a heartfelt apology transformed a difficult situation?
- Is there someone you need to extend forgiveness to or to ask they extend it to you?