

Hospitality



The final stage of the pilgrimage, from Orphir to St Magnus Cathedral, again follows the coast as much as possible – though this time along the gentler waters of Scapa Flow, the largest natural harbour in the northern hemisphere. Our theme for this final stage is Hospitality – reflecting on the place of feasting then and now, as well as the place of welcome afforded Magnus in Kirkwall, and the reception we ourselves anticipate.

Thora, the mother of Magnus, succeeded in getting her son back to Mainland Orkney for a Christian burial. Her secret weapon was hospitality. Thora was to prepare a feast for both Earls after their tryst on Egilsay but only one returned. She served her nephew whilst grieving for her son, plying Hakon with ale and pleading for her son's body. It was a risky strategy but it won out, Hakon weeping for his actions and Magnus's safe passage to Birsay was assured.

Hospitality is inherently risky. Invitations can be refused, conversation stilted, food disappointing and alcohol, meant to place people at ease, can be absent or all too present, causing friction either way. There is a risk to inviting others into an intimate space, sharing what is most precious, devoting time and attention to them without guarantee of return.

Yet when the risk is worthwhile it can be the most precious of times. Feasting implies extravagance – an excess that creates delight because it is such a treat. A meal is a multisensory experience, and the sharing of this is central to the delight.

We learn cultural rules of hospitality – and sometimes we must unlearn them. A way of considering this is that, across cultures there are five elements to hospitality which are usually present but can find very different expressions. These are *Invitation*, *Preparation*, *Reception*, *Celebration* and *Parting*. *Invitation* may be weeks in advance or spur of the moment. *Preparation* is the graft of getting ready – the joy of a meal out is the knowledge others are putting their time into this instead of you. *Reception* is the intimate act of receiving someone into the eating space. Then there is the meal itself – the time of *Celebration*. Afterwards, at some point it must end and rituals of *Parting* ensue.

These stages of hospitality are present in our pilgrimage too. You have been *invited* to participate, we *prepared* a route and resources for you, *received* you into our land and *celebrated* with you both as you walk and as you make it to the end. Then comes the *parting*, the negotiated leaving of the space you have been in, recognising what has changed and what you can take away with you. Perhaps you might then *invite* others...

Questions for the journey

- What have been your most memorable meals and what made them so special?
- Who has inspired you with their hospitality, whether to you or to others?
- How easy do you find it to receive unexpected guests?
- In what ways might you be more welcoming to others, notably others who are not like you?