

# Loss



The first stage of the pilgrimage, from Evie to Birsay, follows the journey of Magnus's body as it was carried from Gurness to Christ Kirk in Birsay. We begin at Gurness and the poem [In every beginning](#) may help to frame your thoughts on embarking on the pilgrimage.

Our theme for this stage is Loss – reflecting on the death of Magnus, the loss of a son for his mother Thora and our own stories of loss.

Loss is an integral part of life and it is also a life work to integrate our sense of loss to the wholeness of our selves. There is no love without loss and the pain of parting can be intense and sustained.

Had it not been for Thora's courage and resourcefulness, the body of Magnus might still be lying in Egilsay. She pleaded with Hakon to allow her to give her son a Christian burial. He consented to her request, leading to the procession of Magnus's body from Gurness to Birsay. It is likely that superstition about transporting corpses by sea played a role in why there was such a long walk rather than sailing directly to Birsay.

[His hands](#) is a reflection on the loss of a son – it could be Thora, or Mary the mother of Jesus or someone you know.

Grief comes in waves and knocks us off our feet, turns everything upside down, tumbles us relentlessly in its surf. There is no escaping it, relief comes only between the waves.

As we walk by the shore, our footing is not always secure, and the coastline changes dramatically with the tide and the weather. You may find it helpful to pick up a stone from the shoreline. Each stone has been battered by the waves, smoothed over time so that it is easier to hold, but still heavy. It can be like this with grief – the loss never goes away but over time it is easier to hold. Easier but not easy.

We can ignore the pain of loss or wallow in it, confront it or deny it – but it is only by acknowledging it and integrating it into our lives that we can walk on, even if always with a limp. What follows are questions for the journey – they are big questions, you may wish to take a couple of miles for each one. Turn them over as you would a stone, feel them from different perspectives and allow a deepening of insight to take place.

## Questions for the journey:

- What have been the most significant losses in your life? These might include the death of family or friends, moving location, ill health or the end of a job or a relationship.
- How have those losses shaped your identity and your expectations of life?
- What are you afraid about losing and why?
- Are there any new insights to be had about how you respond to loss?

If you wish you can then use the prayer of tumult and prayer of limping as you journey on.