

Peace



The pilgrimage around the island of Egilsay is a short easy walk on road and track around the main historical sites, linking the martyrdom monument, bay at the back and St Magnus Kirk. Our theme for the site of Magnus's murder is peace, reflecting on the peace that his death secured, the enduring peace in the islands and at the same time the things which disrupt peace here and elsewhere, in us and around us.

Magnus was brutally executed on Egilsay by Lifolf, cook to Hakon, whose instructions he was carrying out. From the moment he saw Hakon's eight ships, Magnus's every move appears calculated to minimise the loss of life and maximise the chances of an enduring peace in the islands.

Peace is so much more than quiet, so much deeper than the absence of conflict. Much is made of the pursuit of happiness, but the pursuit of peace is all the more elusive, and quite possibly more important. The following are a selection of quotes about peace intended to probe and provoke our understanding of the concept.

- ✚ Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel said: "Peace is our gift to each other."
- ✚ Desmond Tutu, former Bishop of Johannesburg, said: "If you want peace you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies."
- ✚ His good friend, the Dalai Lama said: "Where ignorance is our master, there is no possibility of real peace."
- ✚ Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India said: "Without peace, all other dreams vanish and are reduced to ashes."

We may consider ourselves to be peacable (if only everyone was more like us) and yet scratch beneath the surface and we are riven with conflict. Food, power, sex, money, influence, good standing, success – each of us is a different mix of drives and semi-suppressed urges that risk destroying us and those around us. We are dangerous and yet we are also mottled with glory, beauty, wonder and delight. Our complexity is a great gift and a terrible burden – we remain poorly understood, by self and others and we struggle to understand better, wreaking havoc and bestowing kindness on the way. Peace is costly, difficult and vital. Without a commitment to peace, a belief in the worth of one another that deserves a halting of the cycle of violence, the destruction continues. Magnus remains, after hundreds of years, a compelling example of how even when choices are stripped from us, there is still a choice we can exercise to find a way of peace, for others as well as ourselves.

Questions for the journey

- How comfortable are you at dealing with conflict in your self and others?
- Have you ever felt a sense of peace in the midst of a difficult situation?
- In what area of your life would you most like to ask for peace?
- What does it mean to pursue peace?