Sermon The Museum of the Moon at Carlisle Cathedral

Michael Everitt 25th October 2026

The Venerable Bede was one of the first to observe that there was a connection between the moon and the tides. Scientists explain that this is due to the gravitational pull of the moon on the expanse of water on the earth. It is the earth's gravitational pull on the moon that then keeps it in its orbit of the earth.

For us at the Cathedral there can be no questioning of this gravitational pull. Over three thousand visitors on Saturdays and over a thousand Monday to Friday have been attracted here to gaze in wonder.

When asked, "Why?" I will give the following explanation. It was at the first full moon after the Spring equinox that Moses led the Children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt at the first Passover. It was by the full moon that they began the exodus which would take them to the Promised Land.

It was at the annual commemoration of the Passover that Jesus was crucified and rose again. Setting humanity free from its slavery to sin and the incarceration of the tomb and liberating us into the new and eternal life revealed at the resurrection.

Thus, for Christians the full moon is a statement of freedom and liberation.

The Venerable Bede when considering Easter rejoiced that a full moon as near to the Equinox as possible gives to us in equal twelve-hour portions, twelve hours of the greater light, the sun and then in the night twelve hours of the fullness of the lesser light, the moon. Thus, in Christ's resurrection there is no darkness, night is transformed.

Praying my daily prayers with the moon before me has obviously caused me to ponder deeply what else it might say. Bede speaks of revelation being given by God through Scripture and through Nature. That the world having been made by God shows the maker's mark. (A theme Paley of this parish explores hundreds of years later.)

After being asked "Why?" I am then often asked of what the Moon is made. My immediate reply is of course "cheese." I then say "rock." (I then behave and talk about Luke Jerram's installation of the Museum of the Moon, which was probably the real question all along.)

It is important to realise that this is a work of contemporary art. It is an interpretation that involves the viewer engaging with the artist's intention and work to then participation in a fresh creation. In order to gain an experience of the moon in our midst, beneath our starry ceiling we have something lit from within to enable us to see the details of the craters. The moon in the sky is of course not internally lit, inflated or suspended within an historic building.

The light that we see from the moon at night is all reflected sunlight. The reflected sunlight on hitting the rocky terrain creates the shadows that cause us to see "the man in the moon." Whilst the earth has a degree of protection given through its complex atmosphere and its satellite. The moon itself is unprotected, and the impact of meteors causes it to be pockmarked by craters. The far side, not facing the earth, especially so. (This far side, not visible to humanity is the side I call "God's view," and it is appropriate that this is the side that faces the sanctuary and altar.)

That the light of the moon, the moonlight of romantic music from Beethoven to Debussy is not of the moon but a reflection of a greater light which reveals both the reality of the moon in all its battle-scarred detail and transforms it with a beauty that attracts. Even when we intellectually know

this, it does not alter our perception. We still call it moonlight and refer to full moons that then wane and new moons that wax and grow.

As I have sat in my stall pondering these things, this reflection of a greater light has been a significant theme. As Christians we are called to reflect the light of Christ in the world. Like John the Baptist in the prologue to St John's Gospel, we are not the light, but we "bear witness to the light." And when we reflect the light of Christ it reveals all that we have been through, the collisions and impacts that have occurred on our lives, indeed these give character and depth as the external light both reveals them and is then shown and we shine in a new area. As with any imagery, it does not need to become a whole scheme to live by, but an insight that might assist.

Another observation is that the far side of the moon, the one that in this place faces the altar rather than most observers from the choir stalls. That far side that is not visible on earth due to the nature of the moon's rotation in its orbit, indeed the majority of the moon, not observable from earth has borne the brunt of thousands of meteor collisions and is covered in craters. (Some of these meteors would have otherwise hit earth, with effects on climate and landscape). Thus, the moon reminds us of all the hidden history of created things, including our fellow human beings. Not all injuries are visible.

One of the reasons behind Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon is to inspire us to look at space differently. To engage with the Moon and our relationship with the cosmos in a new and informed way. For Christians this is to realise what holding to the universe being created means, and our relationship to the creator and the responsibilities that then flow. The two great commandments being a fundamental definition of who we should be. It also has enabled us to engage with the space of the cathedral differently. For many giving them a reason for the first time to enter this building and we pray to gain a glimpse of heaven. To realise that this is a place that day in and day out through the regularity of prayer and worship, of breaking bread and reading scripture not only do we see creation afresh, but we also understand the providence of God within and therefore more deeply his love for us. We are bound in a cosmic drama, but one where God knows and calls us by name. We then can reflect his love to others, bringing light in darkness and an understanding of the seasons. All in the context of that which marked both an initial journey from slavery to freedom at the first Passover and one which at the cross and resurrection enabled us all to set free, as the words behind our altar proclaim for "God so loved the world." And in Christ most graphically at the time of the Spring Full moon we are given new life.