Sermon for Harvest, Carlisle Cathedral, Sunday 4 October 2026
Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Luke 12:16-30

On Tuesday evening, when we had our first preview night for the Museum of the Moon, it was extraordinary to see people standing in silence, for once not trying to capture everything on a mobile phone, and simply take in the strange, majestic wonder of the Moon. Luke Jerram's work – a roughly 1:500,000 scale representation of the Moon – derives its power as a work of art partly not only through the artistry of its placing in buildings such as this, but also through the deep human connection we have to the Moon within the cycles and rhythms of life.

This sense of awe has drawn many through human history to recognise in the presence and regular movement of the Moon through the heavens evidence of the ordered nature of God's creation. As William Paley, formerly of this Parish, states in his *Natural Theology* the movement of the heavens speaks both of:

> *the agency of an intelligent Creator …[and]…shews, beyond all other sciences, the magnificence of his operations.*

Unlike other celestial bodies we are related, almost physically, to the effect the Moon has on the rhythms of our own lives. The "Blue Moons" of people's emotions. The waxing and waning of its light marking the pattern of the months. The ebb and flow of the tides that have always defined the life of an island and sea-faring culture as our own.

In many ways the very physical pull the moon has on the reality of our everyday lives should act as a check on the sinful human desire to control and manipulate the world around us. But as we know, the reality of our engagement with creation is far from one which speaks of a life of sympathy and empathy with the ebb and flow and rhythms of God's creation. Too often we are like the apocryphal King Canute, sitting on our thrones of earthly glory assuming that by the power of our human will alone we can control the tides of the created realm and bend them to our will.

Today we are launching a yearlong project *Land, Landscape, and Faith*. This is a joint project working with the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas at the University of Cumbria as well as partners at the Ernest Cook Trust and William Howard School in Brampton.

At the foundation of this project is a recognition that we have become latter day Canutes – seeking to bend the natural world to our will and purpose. More than this, by failing to see the reality of our degraded natural world we are, like Canute, in danger of drowning in the unintended consequences of our hubris.

A recent report by the Wildlife Trust has put stark figures to this reality. The twin effects of intensive farming practices and climate change have brought us to the place where: one-in-six species in the UK are at risk of extinction; that there has been a 54% decrease in flowering plants; and a dramatic loss of natural biodiversity through the loss of natural habitats such as the destruction of 50% of our ancient hedgerows. Ironically, the length of this destroyed hedgerow is enough to take you half-way to the Moon.

Facing the stark reality of this in a real and practical way is at the heart of this project. Over the coming year a group of clergy, ministers and school students from farming backgrounds will meet at Low Beckside Farm in the Lake District and learn first-hand how the team there, through the practices of Regenerative Agriculture, are addressing these challenges through their care for land and livestock. This project is though not merely a means of hand-wringing with wellies on. At the heart of the project is also a desire to reconnect the patterns and rhythms of faith with the patterns and rhythms of the natural world and those who have care for it.

In doing this we have been inspired by the ancient wisdom of this Cathedral Church. Around the praying heart of this church are the "Labours of the Months" – images of medieval farming practise – which remind us of the deep link that exists between the shape of our faith and the natural rhythms of the months and seasons of the agricultural world. Through this project our hope is that we not only learn more about the work of Regenerative Agriculture and the benefits it can have for us all, but also through that reconnect with the ancient sense of sympathy that existed between Land, Landscape and Faith that was known almost implicitly by our ancestors in faith.

On Tuesday night as we welcomed friends and guests to the opening night of the Museum of the Moon, the Dean reminded us of the role that knowledge of the Moon played on the theological vision of another great northern thinker. Not this time William Paley, but the even greater Venerable Bede.

Best known now for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede was also one of the great early medieval observers of the natural world. Through his observations of the cycles of the Moon, he did more than any other to establish the pattern of our calendar and the dating system we still use today.

Unlike Paley though, Bede's vision of the natural world was not that of the out workings of a dispassionate divine watch-maker. Rather the natural world and all creation, including its history, is a living out of the wisdom and word of God. The *Logos,* that became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, imbues all creation with the reflection of the light of God's love – as the Moon reflects on a dark earth the light of the Sun.

This might be an intellectual model which, for some, does not stand up to modern scientific rigour. But for Bede this was – like installations such as the Museum of the Moon – about exciting our imaginative and ethical minds as well as the scientific and rational parts of our brains. As Michelle Brown, the great modern scholar of Bede, has put it:

> *Bede's mindset is characterized…by joined up thinking and the long view, which extended across time and space and occasionally transcended it to glimpse the fourth dimension of eternity and the reconciliation and unification of all Creation, underpinned by Logos – the eternal, creative Word.*

My colleagues at the University might be relieved that we haven't worked this vision into our research aims and outputs, yet! But Bede's vision of the totality of creation, and our place within it, will create for us an imaginative space where we can learn to live again in sympathy with all creation and through that hear again with fresh ears Bede's great prayer:

> *O Christ, our Morning Star,*
> *Splendour of Light Eternal,*
> *Shining with the glory of the rainbow,*
> *Come and waken us*
> *From the greyness of our apathy*
> *And renew in us your gift of hope.*
> *Amen*

Benjamin Carter