Sermon for the Feast of All Saints, Sunday 1 November 2026,
Carlisle Cathedral.

Revelation 7: 9-end; Matthew 5: 1-12

Last week the Dean invited us to reflect on why we have hosted Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon. This morning I want to think about a slightly different question. Not why we have hosted it, but rather why have people responded to it in such extraordinary numbers over this last month?

Such has been the response we will spend a great deal of time reflecting on this whole project as a Cathedral team. But today, on this last day of the Museum of the Moon, on this feast of All Saints these are my own personal reflections to this question.

The first is that this has been a team effort. From the initial idea to host the Museum of the Moon, through the practical planning, the marketing and programming, the training and organising, the booking and moving, this has been a whole team effort. Chapter members supported the project from the outset, members of the staff team have worked above and beyond to cope with the expected and unexpected. And most of all our volunteers have provided a warm welcome. This has been a family affair if you will. And at a time when people don't always know what the church is for, they have known through the reality of this family affair that they are welcome at their Cathedral and responded in kind. In all of this can I take this opportunity to thank the whole Cathedral family for how they have brought this idea to life and made it sing.

And how it has sung.

Which brings us to the second factor. Luke Jerram's work is indeed a fine a powerful one, but it can not I think have hung before in so unique and fitting a setting. More than one person has commented to me that, although they have seen the Museum of the Moon before they have never seen it better presented than here at Carlisle Cathedral. From the drama of your first experience of it through the Great Screen, through its positioning filling but not overpowering the space, to its setting beneath our starry ceiling.

These two factors – the quality of the welcome and the drama of the setting – lead me to a third factor, a factor which is pertinent not only to our reflection on this last month, but also our understanding of this Feast of All Saints. Those visiting have been ready, because of their welcome and the setting, to look beyond themselves and seek a sense of the transcendent each one of us seeks but only glimpses in our present experience.

It is that glimpse of glory which RS Thomas speaks of as when we have:

seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it

This final factor, this seeking for the transcendence, for otherness, is something which is deeply rooted in our humanity. It is that yearning which Augustine speaks of when we seek rest for our restless hearts. Or as RS Thomas goes on to say:

It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

I often think about this sense of yearning, of seeking for the transcendent in physical terms. Some of you will have heard me rehearse this idea before, that human experience and existence exists on two plains. The one we know most easily is the horizontal plain, the world around and beside us. This is a world of the known and the familiar. Against this horizontal plain humanity has always sought to connect to something beyond themselves. To the vertical plain – to a sense of the reality that lies beyond us. That is why, sociologists of religion teach us, humanity has found the divine in trees, in standing stones, even in church towers and spires because the disrupt our "horizontal" experience and ask us to look up and beyond ourselves to something seemingly unknown and unknowable.

I think that the Museum of the Moon has such power because it taps into something deep within our humanity to seek something beyond ourselves. Within this frame there is a theological eloquence in bringing its time with us here to a close as we celebrate this feast of All Saints.

Today the Church changes tack. It would be too simplistic to say that we move from the horizontal realm of ordinary time to the vertical realm of All Saints and All Souls and beyond. However, it is true that today, as we move into what the Church has come to know as Kingdom Season, we are called to seek and know the presence of all who surround us in faith.

Not simply those around us today. But those who create that community comprising, to misquote Edmund Burke, not just the living, but those "who are dead, and those who are to be born." In this season the Church calls us to sit within and within that great cloud of witnesses, to know that in the promise of God's love we live with the hope that our reality is not merely this horizontal realm, but in the vertical realm of the transcending power of God's love.

If my theory is correct and a great deal of the people who have been drawn to the Museum of the Moon because of this wordless desire to seek something beyond themselves, then in Jesus Christ we find the truth that brings meaning to that wordless hope. In Jesus, in the Word become flesh, we are led to know the transcendent vertical power of God's love for us in the one who came to walk with us in all the messiness and complexity of our horizontal world.

Nowhere in Jesus' teaching does he spell out the possibility of this hope than in our Gospel reading this morning. In the Beatitudes Jesus responds to the costs and challenges we face in the world around us and blesses it as signpost to the transcendent hope it leads us to. In each of the great Beatitudes, Jesus pivots between the "now" of the horizontal "Blessed are" and then draws us the transcendent "vertical" hope God offers each one of us. But unlike those countless people who have been seeking for that hope through their encounter with the Museum of the Moon, in the Beatitudes, in Jesus Christ, we are given the certain promise of that future hope.

As Jesus teaches us, each blessing is not followed by "theirs might be" or "theirs could be" but with certainty: "theirs will be".

Over this last month we can be certain that we will have encountered those who are poor in spirit, those who are sorrowful, those who are mourning. And in the beauty of this place in the quality of our welcome, we pray that they will have known, in that moment, that they are blessed and loved by God.

But also, as each one of us looks for that hope beyond ourselves, everyone drawn to this place we will know with a greater certainty that in the love of Jesus Christ, we will be comforted, we will be filled, we will receive mercy, and that each one of us will find our place with all the Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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