

## Readings for the Third Sunday after Pentecost

14<sup>th</sup> June 2026

### First Reading: Exodus 19:2-8a

The Israelites had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

So Moses went, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one, "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do."

### Second Reading: Romans 5:1-8

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

### Gospel: St Matthew 9:35-10:8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

## A Reflection for the third Sunday after Pentecost

*from Rev'd David Higgon*

### **Donald and the Seven Cows**

The Christian faith has always been a faith that sees itself as having a mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. In our reading today Jesus sends his disciples out into the cities and villages to *proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.*

Some of you may have belonged at some time to churches that saw proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ out on the streets as a key mission.

In the far off days of the 1960's , before mobile phones were ever heard of, when there was only two TV channels and before even colour TV had arrived, as teenagers on a Sunday night we would congregate at the centre of our small town on what used to be known as the 'monkey parade' where teenagers, would socialise and try to connect with members of the opposite sex. And it was into this maelstrom of heightened teenage hormones that the local evangelical church would send out its members to proclaim the 'good news' by giving out bible tracts and using strange religious words like Repent and be Saved. As a spotty fifteen-year-old I wondered what I had to be saved from. And the message that the kingdom of God was 'nigh', always left me with a sense that God was somewhere else other than the small town I lived in.

Some forty years later, when I was a curate in Derbyshire, I was actively involved in hosting annual missions in our parish where students from one of the nearby bible colleges would engage with the local schools mainly through worship music. The tone of the message had changed from that of my youth, which had been one of an angry distant God who would condemn me to hell, to an image of a loving God of mercy who cared for us all but I was still uneasy about the underlying optimism in their message that if you turned to God all in your life would be well.

Mission and evangelism is a hall mark of the church and supporting overseas mission has been a major part of this. Unfortunately, overseas evangelism and mission became associated with colonialisation and empire and people like Cecil Rhodes in south Africa who equated the British empire as the fulfilment of God's purposes on earth. The church has had to do a lot of soul searching about its past and its association with colonialism and slavery.

Personally, I have found a profound meaning in what Jesus said to his disciples that, "*The kingdom of heaven has come near.*". in my daily encounters with the nature that surrounds me and that are mirrored in the poetry and prose of Welsh Irish and Scots Gaelic religious poets, the theology and philosophy of Johannes Scottus Eriugena a remarkable 9<sup>th</sup> century Irish philosopher, and in Alexandra Carmichael's collection of hymns and incantations, the *Carmina Gadelica* collected from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What is essential about all these sources is the recognition of the place of nature, and the refusal to set up opposition between the worlds of grace and humanity and the natural world. God's grace is best evidenced in the natural world of which we are a part and in the realisation that God is closer to us than our very breath.

In recent years, I have come across the works of a modern Gaelic author and poet, Angus Peter Campbell. His recent book *Donald and the Seven Cows* is a novel about a solitary old farmer on a Scottish island who talks to his cows because he has no one else to talk to on a daily basis. This isn't a fairy tale story, but fairies do feature in it.

This is a tale of an old crofter Donald Michael MacDonald coming to terms with the modern world. Donald's life appears to be one of failure: missed opportunities, lack of ambition, stifled romance, and unutterably boring loneliness. Donald, however, seems to be at peace with the world, contented. He's an odd one. His neighbours call him a fool and think he may be coming adrift mentally.

Donald spends all day with his cows, leading them on a "round mile" and stopping to graze at twelve marked intervals, which at times correspond with the Stations of the Cross. As Donald goes around his daily walk he meditates on his life, his cows, his neighbours, on matters of faith, on relationships, and the change and loss of community that he has witnessed through his life. Each stop is a reflection on a memory associated with that place or a folktale related to that landscape. Donald talks to his cows, to folktale characters, and to the people of his past. And they talk back to him.

We are never quite sure about Donald's sanity. Is he imagining his conversations with the landscape, or does he really believe they are happening?

In the end, Donald is compelled to make a decision about what sort of life he wishes to have: the comfort of living in splendour or the real life he has with his cows. At its core this is a book about faith, and meaning, and reality.

In Donald we have a profound understanding of Jesus's words, 'the Kingdom of God is near' and whilst it is profound, it is expressed in the simplest of terms.

Let me read to you a short passage, Donald says, 'I don't believe in God because I've seen miracles or because it comforts me but because he's as real to me as the wellington boots I stand in. He's everywhere, from the gurgling sound my tea makes as I pour into my cup first thing every morning to the wild way the wind sweeps against the gable end of the house every night. The miracle is that I can lie down to sleep every night and get up every morning believing it's worth getting up again. To stir the fire and boil the kettle and feed Wilhelmina [his cat] and Rover [his dog] and to greet Maisie and the herd, again and again, for our new day's adventure.'

Donald's world and his narrative speak to us of the nearness of God and of his kingdom in the minutiae of our everyday lives and in the interconnectedness of all things in whom God is present.

So, as we go, we too have a message to proclaim: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" and we can express this message simply, by reflecting the message in the ways we choose to live day by day, in our daily awareness that God's grace is present in the natural world of which we are a part, and in an awareness that God is closer to us than our very breath, and in how we share this awareness in our conversations with others, real or imaginary.