



Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Colossians 1:1-14

There's a well-known verse nestling in the middle of this reading: "we have heard of your faith... and... love... because of the hope laid up for you in heaven". Those are my italics. The reason this verse stops me in my tracks is because I wonder what I – what we – think of heaven. (By "we" I don't just mean "we Christians" – this is a question for everyone.)

Cartoon heaven has a large ornate gate rising out of a cloud, with St Peter acting as a kind of bouncer, and cherubs, complete with halos and harps, lounging around on cushiony clouds. We may not take that literally, but do we have an alternative in our mind's eye? Do we need some idea of heaven for the health of our faith? Or is the very notion damaging and distracting? Was John Lennon right? Is it healthy to think that "above us [is] only sky"?

This is one for personal reflection and prayer, so I can only provide my own insight, with the help of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He preached about this in 1878: "It is clear that no man has a hope laid up in heaven

unless he has hope within himself." I agree. It's not about keeping our fingers crossed, hoping that something might or might not be reality, for surely that's a distraction. It's about looking deeper within, drawing on our inner, God-given resources, to find the flame of hope within. Hope, like charity, begins within – heaven in the here and now. ☺

**Lord, thank you for hope, for heaven, and for the here and now. Keep me focused on this, and help me to keep the flame flickering, even on days of dark doubt. Amen.**

## St Swithun

by Julian Smith

*St Swithun is commemorated in the Common Worship lectionary on Tuesday.*

Immortality is assured when a rose is named after you. St Swithun has "large, strongly-scented, soft-pink blooms of more than a hundred petals".

But Swithun's fame does not depend upon a rose. Nor does it depend upon knowledge of his holy and humble life, his ten years as Bishop of Winchester in the mid-tenth century, or his time as an adviser to King

Egbert. Swithun is remembered for the legend that attends the moving of his body.

According to his wishes, Swithun was buried in a simple grave outside his cathedral. When a new cathedral was being built it was planned to move his remains to a shrine within the building. Despite dire warnings of storms and tempests, Swithun's remains were moved on 15 July 971 – and forty days of storms ensued.

Never mind the rose, Swithun is remembered for his link to the weather, and his day is anticipated with trepidation. ☺

## Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

We've lived on our eleven-acre smallholding for twelve years. When we came here, Wales was a new country for us, though we'd got connections, and a new language. "How can we belong?" was my first thought – I can learn how to keep sheep and pigs, how to grow fruit and veg, and I already kept poultry, but how can we sink deep into this new place and begin to belong?

As a priest it was easier for me than for my non-churchgoing husband. I met people immediately and became known by them. I joined a choir and my local Welsh-speaking chapel, I learned some Welsh, we shopped very locally. We employed local craftspeople to fix things. We began to belong more deeply. This weekend my husband went on his first charity tractor run and discovered he belonged.

It's part of the God-giveness of being accepted and it's not all hard work. ☺

“Teach me, O God... to breathe deeply in faith.”

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher, theologian and poet