

15th Sunday After Pentecost

Exodus 12.1-14

Psalms 149

Romans 13.1-10

Matthew 18.10-20

Rev'd Lauren Martin

Let Grace Flow

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

Friends, today is a day for giving thanks.

It is the birthday of Holy Hermits Online, and birthdays matter. They invite us to pause, give thanks, and notice what God has been doing among us. This community is real because the people are real: our stories, our griefs, our hopes, our questions, our gifts, and the quiet acts of care that hold us together. Somehow, by grace, God is making us a community.

So today, we celebrate all of us. Some gifts are easy to see, and others are quiet, hidden, or known only to God. But every person who belongs to Holy Hermits Online matters. Each one of us adds something to the song God is singing among us.

Today we also mark the beginning of the Season of Creation. With church communities around the world, we remember that God is Creator, and that creation is God's good gift to cherish, not simply admire. It calls us into love, care, and responsibility.

Into these celebrations, Exodus gives us a powerful word. God says, "This month shall mark for you the beginning of months." God says it before everything is sorted out. The people are still in Egypt. They are not yet free. The road ahead is uncertain. With hurried bread, sandals on their feet, and staff in hand, they are given a new beginning.

That is good news for us. Today is not only about looking back with gratitude, though we do that gladly. It is also about asking, gently and honestly: what new beginning is God giving us now?

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What freedom is God leading us toward? What habits of love, courage, and care might we practise in this new season?

Psalms 149 says, "Sing to the Lord a new song." Maybe that is a birthday prayer for every living community. It does not mean forgetting the old songs; many have carried us through grief and joy, ordinary Sundays and holy days. But God is always teaching the church to sing again. A new song can sound like welcome, forgiveness, courage, or the Spirit calling us into something new.

Paul, in Romans, gives the song its heartbeat: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Love is the debt we never finish paying. Here, love is the care that holds us together between Sundays: the noticing, the checking in, the pause before speaking, the refusal to turn another person into a username or an argument. Love protects dignity. Love asks, "Who is isolated? Who has gone quiet? Who needs us to notice?"

That is where Matthew takes us. Jesus says, "Do not despise one of these little ones." The little ones may not always be obvious. They may be the person who feels invisible, the newcomer unsure whether they belong, or the one carrying private pain. Then Jesus talks about reconciliation—about moving towards one another when something has broken. That is holy work, because Jesus promises, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

That promise belongs to us today. Christ has been here in celebration and in quiet faithfulness: in contemplation, candlelight, whispered prayers, songs carried through speakers, and conversations that helped people keep going. Sometimes the presence of Christ feels like a great celebration. Sometimes it feels like two or three people breathing, listening, and refusing to give up on love.

And as we enter the Season of Creation, that love widens again. We are deeply connected to the earth: to birdsong outside the window, rain on the roof, bread and water on our tables, sunlight on our skin, and cool water in our hands. Even our digital life depends on minerals, energy, water, labour, and land. If love fulfils the law, then love must shape how we live with our neighbours, with future generations, and with the earth that sustains us.

So perhaps today's message is simple, but not small: will we keep grace to ourselves, or let it flow? Will we be a closed channel, or a living stream carrying Christ's love for the healing of people and creation?

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So, on this day of celebration, may we be a stream. May Holy Hermits Online refresh the weary, welcome the overlooked, and care tenderly for creation. May our life together become a new song of peace, service, and small acts of love. May we step into the new beginning God places before us. And may those who come after us say: here was a people who loved one another, loved their neighbours, loved the earth, and trusted that Christ was among them.

Let us pray. God of new beginnings, gather us like drops of water into one living stream. Bless this new year in the life of Holy Hermits Online. Let your love move through our words, our silences, and our service. Refresh the weary, lift the overlooked, mend what is wounded, and teach us to care gently for your good creation. May Christ be among us, and may your living water flow through us, today and always. Amen.