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Consecration Sunday  
Nov. 27, 2019  
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Cape Lookout National Seashore  
is a chain of undeveloped barrier islands  
off the coast of North Carolina.  
The only way to get there is by boat.  
The islands are home to a lot of birds,  
And one of them has a population of some wild horses,  
But on the whole, other than a few rats and rabbits,  
Mammals on the islands are rare.  
But last month, park officials  
Stumbled upon some unexpected new inhabitants:  
Three slightly bedraggled cows making themselves at home on the shore.

Of course, only the cows know for sure how they got there.  
But park officials have a theory:  
They think the cows swam at least four miles to get there  
After Hurricane Dorian  
hit the North Carolina coast in September.

They think the cows probably came from Cedar Island,  
A small fishing community  
Connected to the mainland by a causeway.  
The island was inundated with eight feet of water by Dorian.  
Sadly, dozens of wild horses on the island drowned,  
As did many of the wild cows that roamed the island.

They think that these three cows managed to survive  
By swimming across the raging waters of Core Sound,  
Propelled by the storm surge.

“Who knows exactly?” park spokesman B.G. Horvat told the *Charlotte Observer*.

“But the cows certainly have a gripping story to share.”

Now, I was immediately touched by this story,  
As were animal lovers everywhere, I presume.  
But the story of the cows' survival was especially meaningful  
To Cedar Island residents digging out from the storms' devastation.  
Most folks on the island lost everything.  
"It's amazing how strong and resilient these animals have been,"  
said one Cedar Island local.

Amazing, indeed!  
Of course it's long been known  
That cows have the incredible ability to jump over the moon.  
But who knew that cows could swim?  
Well, I was so taken with this idea of heroically swimming cows,  
That I did a little research,  
And I discovered that cows are actually quite good swimmers ...  
When they need to be.

They may not be as flashy and well-known as, say,  
The ponies of Chincoteague,  
Whose yearly swim  
Draws tens of thousands of spectators.

But livestock experts say that most cows  
are very adept swimmers.  
They're very strong animals.  
And if you ever find yourself caught in a flood,  
With the rain coming down and the water rising,  
Cozying up to a cow is a pretty good place to be.  
If you're not sure you have the strength to save yourself,  
Grab onto that cow's tale,  
And let her pull you along.  
Cows can survive a lot of things  
That other, less sturdy animals could not.  
Cows know how to endure.

I thought of these cows this week  
As I studied our gospel lesson this morning.  
Jesus knows that the time for his death is fast approaching,  
And he wants to prepare his disciples  
For the hardships that will follow.

He warns them that things could get ugly.  
They may be persecuted and betrayed.  
Some may be put to death.  
But stick it out, he tells them.  
Endure, for in the end, you will not perish.

Maybe, if Jesus had lived in a different time and place,  
He might have described himself as a good cowboy  
Instead of a good shepherd,  
And he might have told his disciples  
To be like those cows:  
Sturdy and calm and usually peaceful,  
But strong enough to ride out life's storms,  
And adaptable enough to survive and thrive,  
Even when we find ourselves tossed up on unfamiliar shores.

Today is Consecration Sunday at Saint James,  
The day in which we're all asked to make our pledge to the church  
For the coming year.  
I think that our willingness to pledge our money and our time  
Says something about the faith that we have  
In the organization to which we make our pledge.  
Nobody wants to invest a lot of capital  
In something that's not going to survive.  
We want to direct our limited resources  
Into things that are going to be around, to pay dividends.

And these days, a lot of people are wondering, rightly,  
How much longer the church is going to be around.  
I mean, look at us!  
Saint James is pretty typical of the demographics of most churches these  
days.  
We're pretty gray.  
We have lots more members in their 70s and 80s  
Than we do in their 20s and 30s,  
And it's not always clear to us  
Who will pick up the banner  
Once we can no longer carry it.

We wonder if maybe Jesus' words about  
 The fate that awaited the Temple in Jerusalem,  
 Might not be equally apt  
 In describing the fate that awaits the church as we know it today.  
 "The day will come when not one stone will be left upon another.  
 All will be thrown down."

Well, maybe.  
 I wish I could say that won't happen, but it could.  
 But here's the thing.  
 I think we church members really are a lot like those cows.  
 In the best of times,  
 Christ, the good cowboy, leads us to green pastures,  
 And by still waters.

But we are also remarkably good swimmers ...  
 When we have to be.  
 This is especially true of the good folks of Saint James.  
 Most of the time we are sturdy and calm and peaceful.  
 But we have yet to see the storm we can't weather.  
 And while we may wind up looking a bit bedraggled  
 On some shore we never imagined we'd be standing on,  
 We're survivors.  
 Christ, the good cowboy,  
 Still guides us,  
 And we bear Christ's brand,  
 Because we are marked as Christ's own forever.

You know, our Old Testament lessons this morning, from Isaiah  
 Is often referred to as the peaceable kingdom,  
 Because of its reference to the wolf and the lamb  
 Lying down together  
 And the lion eating hay with the ox –  
 Or possibly with the cow.  
 Really though, this passage is also a reminder  
 Of God's transforming love.  
 God is creating something new,  
 Something unknown and unseen before,  
 Something that may take us to surprising places  
 In surprising ways.

Who knows how, exactly?  
All we know for sure is that in the end,  
We're all going to have a gripping story to tell.