

Pentecost June 9th 2019

Every month or so the vicar convenes a ministry team meeting. Last month I missed it so I asked David Adams – like me, a retired priest – “how did it go?”. David hesitated and then said “I detected a murmuring in the mulberry trees”. Although I would recognise a mulberry tree, indeed I am very fond of them, I hadn’t a clue what he was talking about. “Go and look it up,” he said - 2 Samuel Ch 5, so I did. A murmuring in the mulberry trees was a sign that the Spirit of God was at work, the Spirit of God was stirring.

Today is all about that same spirit of God. Today is the day of Pentecost, the feast day of the Holy Spirit of God. It also marks the last day – the 50th day in fact – of the great Easter season. The season when we celebrate the joy of Christ’s resurrection and the new life that he brings. That new life – that Christian life – begins today for Darcey, when she begins her Christian journey by being baptised in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But who or what is this Holy Spirit?

Well, the Spirit of God is mentioned many times in today’s service; for example the response “Fill us with your Holy Spirit” and “The Lord is here, his Spirit is with us” to name but two. This is how Henri Nouwen – the famous Catholic priest and writer – put it in his diary shortly before his death: “Pentecost is the coming of the spirit of Jesus into the world. It is the celebration of God breaking the boundaries of time and space and opening the whole world to the re-creating power of love. Pentecost is freedom, the freedom of the spirit of God to blow where it wants”. I find that all quite mind-blowing.

There is a story told of a little boy who, on coming home from Sunday school, told his Mum that the vicar had said that God was everywhere. “That’s true” his mother said. “Is he in the oven when it

is hot”, the boy asked his mother. “Yes he is” she replied. “How about the cupboard?” “Oh yes,” said his mother. “Well, how about the fridge, when the door is closed and the light is off?”. “Oh yes” said his mother. “What about the cake tin?” asked the boy as he took off the lid. “Well yes, I suppose he is”. The boy slammed the tin shut and announced triumphantly “Got him!”. Of course, the mother had a lot more explaining to do.

Although it’s a humorous story, there is I believe some truth in it. Often we can think of God in similar ways to the boy. We think we can put God in a tidy package which we can control and understand completely. We want a God of our own making, a tame and domesticated God. The first day of Pentecost demonstrated that God could not be contained, certainly not in a box, nor in a building nor even within a small group of faithful followers.

We heard in today’s reading that the spirit of God came upon the disciples like the rush of a violent wind and that tongues of fire appeared on them and that they were changed from being an anxious, timid group of people into a confident, spirit-filled group prepared to spread their experience of God’s love and transforming power with the world. On that day the Church was born. That creative activity of God, which was there at the beginning of time and which empowered Jesus, was now present in them, the Church.

The question for us is - Can we detect a murmuring in the mulberry trees? Can we detect the Spirit of God transforming our lives? As we sing in the hymn “Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love as thou wouldst love and do what thou wouldst do”.

Can we detect the murmuring of the mulberry trees in the parish? I think we can and I thank God for it. People coming to faith through baptism and confirmation, our commitment to working with young people, our endeavours to become an EcoChurch, our concern for

refugees, caring for the elderly, the housebound and the bereaved, our work for Christian Aid. But the Spirit of God is not just confined to our own lives or the life of the parish or even to our town or nation. It blows where it wills. If we are open to the Spirit, then what opportunities and what challenges lie ahead for us. Just think for a minute what sort of world we want Darcey to grow up into.

2G y. If it's a world where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are able to flourish (and we are told by Jesus that these are fruits of the Spirit) then we must allow ourselves to be transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit – not just at Pentecost, but in the way we live our lives and shape our world day by day.