**SERMON FOR PENTECOST | 23.05.21**

**Acts 2: 1-11; Romans 8: 22-27; St John 15: 26,27; 16: 4b-15**

**It is always interesting when people point out to you things that you would otherwise miss. During last week’s retreat led by John Bell on the theme of miracles, he spent quite a lot of time showing how – in stories in St John’s Gospel in particular - he spent quite a lot of time showing how, within each story, there are a series of changes of location. The story might start in the Temple and then move on to a street scene and then perhaps to a private house. And at each change of venue a new idea would emerge in one of the people taking part. How could, after all these years, not note these changes of location? The answer is, sometimes you need someone with you to point out the obvious – and sometime the less obvious too.**

**For example in the great story of Pentecost, the disciples are not huddled away secretly for fear of being arrested. When the great experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit comes, it makes such a great commotion that people rush to where they are to see what is going on. And the contrast is obvious: far from being quiet in case they got into trouble they are suddenly able to communicate in ways that defied any kind of logic: people could understand what they were saying: understanding here being the operative word. It wasn’t so much a matter of languages (although the list is impressive!) it was that wonderful skill of being able to talk at whatever level was necessary to make real contact with people from different places. As St Luke writes: *they were able to speak in other languages ‘as the Spirit gave them ability’.***

**And that is why today is called the birthday of the Church: it is the day when God finally entrusted ordinary people to proclaim the Good News – not the prophets, not even Jesus but his own creation, his children – or better still, “his adopted ones” as St Paul expresses it in the second reading. Adopted ones. What St Paul wants us to grasp is that this journey of faith is by no means automatic. At some point we move from being just creatures into this special relationship as adopted children.**

**Anyone who has been adopted, or knows someone adopted, will know the moment when the new parents have to tell their child that they aren’t biologically connected. It is a big moment, and sometimes a very difficult occasion.**

**But the over-riding message will be that the child was chosen and is therefore unbelievably special. *You didn’t choose me but I chose you,* we heard in the Gospel last week. Being singled out for being who we are is one of the greatest gifts we ever receive in life – and it happens on many different occasions, not least when we start a loving relationship as adults. And of course it lies at the heart of what God is doing all the time, adopting those who turn to him in faith.**

**Today we welcome Thomas Gerbeaux into the Christian community by baptism. From any standpoint it looks like a rather random event, a talented French writer of children’s books, who has lived in London for ten years, who comes across St James’ - during the lockdown – and gets in touch asking to be baptised…**

**And over the last few months we have seen his early interest in French Church buildings grow and his study of the Bible, develop into something else: a living relationship with a Church community who have done their best to *guide him into the truth* as St John says: and more than that to develop friendships – with Eddie his sponsor, and with Bobby and I as we say Evening Prayer together on Thursday evenings, so that we begin to develop a family life beyond what he reads or appreciates aesthetically: so that he knows himself to be adopted by the Church which it itself continuously discovering how the fruits of the Spirit draw us into new truths and new discoveries – teaching us how to pray so that we are shaped by the will of God.**

**And that is the nature of Christian ministry today. So often it can seem like just hard work, ‘keeping the show on the ground’. And then the Spirit of God changes it all – with Thomas – with the offer of Freddie Crowley and his colleagues to sing. It may appear random but of course it is what happens when the Spirit of Truth comes among us.**

**No longer are we to hide away, ashamed or embarrassed by our apparent lack of success. God’s Spirit is ready to take on the world! All he needs is for us to be willing to be ‘firm in hope’: eager and ready to support all who seek the face of God in this place – adopting those who, like the crowds at Pentecost, want to come and see what all the fuss is about!**

**Pray God we have the enthusiasm and the skills to share what the Spirit tells us!**