



4 June 2017
Pentecost Sunday
Sung Eucharist
Acts 2 vv. 1–21
John 17 vv. 1–11

The Conspiracy of God
By The Rev'd Duncan Dormor,
Dean, St John's College

May I speak in the Name of Christ through the Spirit of Truth to the glory of God.

Question: What is faith?

Answer: Resolutely shutting your eyes to scientific fact?

Question: What is the human intellect?

Answer: A barrier to Faith.

Question: What are the seven Christian Virtues?

Answer: Respectability, childishness, mental timidity, dullness, sentimentality, censoriousness, and depression of spirit.

Question: Wilt thou be baptized into that faith?

Answer: No chance.

No chance indeed!

This exchange - from the writer Dorothy Sayers - captures something of how the Church is perceived by many. Which is why I say:

Thank God for Pentecost,

Thank God for the opportunity to remind ourselves what the church truly, deeply - and madly is, and should be: A laboratory for Resurrection. A place for experimentation in and through the Spirit, for transformation – not a place of refuge for those seeking the safe, the small-minded, the inward-looking club.

But it is genuinely a wrestling – both inside the church and inside each one of us - to deepen our understanding and experiencing of what it means to be church, to be a community that participates in the Resurrection of Christ; that is caught up in the life of God through the Spirit – the Spirit that blows where it will, that speaks to each in their own language, in their own terms, that reaches in; that transforms, opens out, which in its liberating quality - gives off the whiff of anarchy, high spirits, intoxication.

As Sayers suggests humans constantly lust for certainty and security. That lust for certainty can take a range of very different forms – we see it in the violence and sectarianism of extremists. But, for most of the rest of us it is much more likely to take a very different form – it tempts us towards a small and predictable space; to preferring false security to the unpredictable; our selfish anxieties to the freedom and generosity of the dance to which the spirit urges us. Again and again, we try to domesticate, to seek to make safe, seeks to pull Jesus inside our conventional wisdom, our sensible schemes, our moderate proposals.

So Thank God for Pentecost with its anarchic spirit – with its challenging and expanded vision of diversity and plurality – celebrating the breaking down of barriers – of language, of ethnicity – in Acts. But also – perhaps more intimately in the Gospel of John – that sense of the breaking down of more personal barriers: for here we find the God who passes through the locked doors; through the layers of fear and anxiety that the disciples have erected for themselves.

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For the disciples, the stated reason given for locking the door on the inside is of course a ‘fear of the Jews’. Well, that fear of the world and its very real dangers are palpable enough – and we know that this morning as we pray for those who have lost their lives in the latest terror attack in London. Such events alert us to the close relationship between the threat without and our fears within. We know we simply cannot allow terror and fear to dominate. We know that a world driven by fear and anxiety is a diminished and diminishing world. And so we stand, we stand together.

In the gospel we can see behind the locked doors - the feelings of loss and despair, of disappointment, of unfulfilled expectations, see that the real padlock is on their hearts, which is why they do not automatically recognize the God of Love, that is Jesus in their midst. So too, we all have a tendency to invest in barriers, to build defences; to protect ourselves against the ‘slings and arrows’ out there – against which there can be no guarantees. In our own reality - it is then the fears and fantasies and anxieties within that are the more troubling. Yet such a search for a feeling of security is a hopeless task – for the search for security and the feeling of insecurity are the same.

And it can lead us - if not to the sectarian violence of the terrorist then to the temptation of a turned-in religion of moralism – of private perfection, of rituals of moral achievement, to comparison, into a psychology where we and others are never quite pure enough, holy enough, moral enough – to be proper Christians, to be considered deserving of God.

Just as in the face of real, external threat, of terror, we are called to stand, called to courage together, alongside, in solidarity; so too in our daily lives – we are called to have the courage to be. The courage to abide in Love, in Christ, to stand in and through and with the Spirit of Love. We are called to be what one might call the ‘conspiracy of God’; that is to the ‘breathing together’ of the Spirit, to respond to the invitation to dance – and in turn to welcome all people into a community of participation and transformation; a community of sinners; of inadequates; of beggars and fools; of those who seek to be open to God exactly as they, we are, to be met by God in the middle of our sinning, in the nakedness, the transparency of our fears and anxieties, in the exposure of our wounds; ‘delightfully and appropriately unsettled’ by the spirit of Pentecost who gives birth to the Church and to hope in our hearts, hope rooted in that Peaceable Kingdom of Christ in which we seek a world that is redeemed, reconciled and repaired.