

2025 ALL-AGE TALK, 8.6.25, GENESIS 2: 15-20, JOHN 3:1-8

WILD PENTECOST – CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

What do we think of first when I say this word: ‘Church’... ? All sorts of things come to mind, of course. One of the first things I think of is of a building, a place where God’s people meet to worship & fellowship together... Now ***this*** building is, of course, a place of special memories & great resource for ourselves & for our community too. But God thinks of something different, when we speak of ‘church’. ‘Ekklesia’ means: ***God’s called out people / God’s called out people...***

On this Pentecost Sunday, we must not forget this. Pentecost only happened when God’s people got out of the building. Yes, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit fell on the believers while they were meeting together in someone’s house. But God’s Spirit must have driven the believers from that house. As they were filled with the Spirit, the house got emptied, very quickly. Church is a scattering of people as much as it is a gathering of people. As Jesus said about the glorious Temple in Jerusalem, God cannot be contained by any building. Likewise, God’s Spirit-filled people cannot be contained by any walls. When we think & talk of ‘church’, much better to have a picture of a group gathered in the street or under a tree. Open-air church. Wild church. (Woodland church).

?? (As I was preparing this talk, I was reminded of one of our local Christian martyrs. Not St Alban, but Thomas Harding of Chesham. He was worshipping God one day in the woods around Chesham when he was arrested for not being ‘in church’... Thomas was worshipping God in spirit & in truth. He was worshipping God in his own language (not Latin) & they condemned him for it. How ironic, given the story of Pentecost, of people from many nations, each worshipping God in their own language).

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the work of the Holy Spirit, it blew his mind. He couldn’t grasp what Jesus was saying. Both about the wind of God’s Spirit which blew wherever it wanted & knew no limits. And about God’s Spirit re-birthing someone & making them ‘new people’... How crazy & wild is God’s Pentecost! The out-pouring of God’s Spirit on all flesh... Alleluia !

Thanks be to God for the wonderful work of his Holy Spirit, in us & in our world. Thanks be to God for work of God throughout ***all*** creation. Just before I

finish, I want us to think of one of the first things God told the first human being to do. This was soon after Adam was told to care for all creation...

Again, this is about words & language. This wasn't about our Creator asking Adam to use his tongue to worship God. No. God invited Adam to name his fellow creatures. To take into account all other living things. This is something that often gets overlooked in the story of God creating Adam & Eve.

God's called-out people, God's spirit-filled people are meant to take on our lips - & therefore on our hearts - the whole wonder of God's creation. The open-air, wild church of Pentecost is a church which celebrates the totality of God's diverse creation. Yes, we are to share with our fellow human-beings the wonder of all that God has done in his Son, our Saviour Jesus. But this does not overlook the wonder of God's creation, which God is also committed to re-creating.

Three applications from this message for you to consider today. Firstly, you might like to name & find out more about one of God's fellow creatures. For example, any living thing you see in the park later today. Or perhaps about the Peregrine Falcons nesting on the top of St Albans Abbey right now. (You can watch them on the live web cam on the Abbey's website, as the mummy falcon sits on her eggs & waits for them to hatch). The babies should be hatching from their eggs within the next week or two... Exciting !

Secondly, you might consider protecting British wildlife, by writing to our MP. There's a new Planning Bill being debated by our political leaders. Part 3 of this Bill could mean that more & more British wildlife is endangered by us building stuff in the wrong places. It's been said, by our local Wildlife Trust, that 5,000 habitats for wildlife are being threatened, including the New Forest & the Peak District. There is more in our church newsletter about this.

Thirdly, I encourage you to pray. To pray that God gives you his Holy Spirit. So you can do that 'crazy thing' of sharing the good news of Jesus with those around you. The good news of our Saviour, crucified & risen. Our down-to-earth friend who is passionate about all creation. Pray for God's leading to speak to someone who is open to hearing good news. Pray for the Spirit's help for this. And that might mean in ways that we would not normally expect. We are God's called out people, led by a Spirit that blows wherever & however this 'Wild One' wants.

I would like to finish by reading a poem from 'wild Wales'. Written around the same time as St Francis was around, 700 years ago. This is 'Woodland Mass' by Gwyn Williams: (READ... 'Threshold of Light', p.13)