

March 2017

The Rector writes:

What does it mean to be made new?

As I write this article I have just come into the study from a cold morning outside. Yet there is a definite sense that Spring is in the air. Certainly the evidence is there in the Rectory garden as daffodils poke through the surface and leaf buds on various shrubs. The morning sun streaming through the study window makes the cold study seem warmer and more cheerful too.



All this serves as a reminder that we wake to a world which is being renewed, made new every morning, recreated by the Spirit which once hovered over the waters, filled with the breath of life as were the plants and creatures in the first garden at the beginning of time.

Every day the world wakes up to find itself remade: dew lies beaded on the grass, birds sing in the trees and hedgerows, leaf buds begin to uncurl on trees, beautiful flowers open to the sunshine. Life is in the air, there to be breathed in, absorbed, and wondered at.

Soon it will be summer, and a new generation of creatures will fill the earth and skies. Eagles will soar in the highlands, and song thrushes will fledge from the nests of the suburbs. Fox cubs will scavenge in dustbins, and mayflies rise up in clouds over stream and lake. And everywhere, the newness of life will intrude on the inevitable reality of a world in decay, a world that is groaning, a world that is waiting.

The pages of the Bible are full of illustrations from nature, often in metaphor or simile. Jesus himself often taught about life in the Spirit by drawing on the life of the created world in illustration and parable (the lilies of the field or sowing wheat for example). When he did so it was always more than a picture, always more than the simple use of the

familiar and concrete to explain the abstract reality of the way things are - for as CH Dodd once remarked, *'it arises from a conviction that there is no mere analogy, but an inward affinity, between the natural order and the spiritual order'*.

The natural world, then, is a reflection of spiritual reality. This should not surprise us. The Word that spoke life in the beginning is the same Word who speaks life now. The Spirit who hovered over the waters when the world was born is the same Spirit who brings new birth to our spirits today. Life physical and life spiritual are rooted in the same God, the God who himself is life. And so it is that in the visible renewal of the world around us, we find the key to the spiritual renewal which is to take place within us.

As St Paul writes to the fledgling church in Rome:

Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

(Romans 1.20)

So what might be the signs of Spring to look forward to in the church? Where might new life and new growth be found and what might be the evidence of them? What is the Holy Spirit saying to the church in these changing and challenging times in which we live? These are some of the big questions that are being asked in our Diocese in its programme of 'Our Conversation, Our future'.

Here in Chelsfield we are committed to spending more time in prayer as we seek to discern the Holy Spirit's direction and pray for renewal in our church and community – will you join us? Watch for details on church newsletter and in next months magazine..

Yours in Christ,
Reverend John, your Rector.