

RECTOR'S PINT

We have the good fortune to be able to take off every few weeks for a night or two to the house in Gloucestershire, in a village on the western banks of the River Severn, which we have owned now for two years. I have written about this before. The house is on a lane which ends on a bank overlooking the river. It is a beautiful and wild spot. It has become a 'thin place' for me, a place where I purposefully seek the presence of God. It is a place where I can pray.

A short walk away, on a high bluff overlooking the river is the Parish church, which has a spectacular view of the Severn and the Cotswolds beyond. The curate, who has recently moved on to a parish of his own, was very creative, and has put poems around the churchyard. Some of them are by Malcolm Guite, who I have used both in these 'Pints' and in some of our services. The poem I particularly love, however, is by the American, Wendell Berry, who is described as a novelist, poet, essayist, environmental activist, and farmer! It is placed on the railings overlooking the steep drop to the river. It is not a 'Christian' poem and doesn't in fact mention God at all, but I think it is deeply spiritual and it speaks to me. Some of you will know it. It is called 'The Peace of Wild Things'.

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water. and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

I readily admit that nature is one of my pathways to God. The ever-changing wildness of the Severn at Newham, where more than once I have seen 'the great Heron feed', opens me up to the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of peace, but it is not a tamed peace. Another place, closer to home, is the Haselev windmill, with its expansive views and chorus of skylarks. I always pause there on my morning dog walks, and again, it is a place where I can, and do, pray, for local people, and for the parishes. I can see all three from there! We all know that we face big issues, but I believe that we need to find moments (and for some these might be associated with places) where we can stop, listen, and re-charge, and if it is our inclination, pray. For me, at a time of turmoil, listening to the peace of the 'wild things' of God has become such an important and necessary thing to do.

Simon