

Parish of Esher
Christ Church, Esher with St George's, West End

SERMON

Sixth Sunday of Easter, 26 May 2019
9.00am Sung Communion, St George's, West End
Acts 16.9-15; Psalm 67; John 14.23-29

Canon Richard Truss

I came across a new word the other day, something that becomes rarer as you grow older. The word is Golem, not to be confused with Gollum of Lord of the Rings (though Gollum might well be a form of golem).

Apparently in Judaism of a more mystical variety, a golem is an unseen presence who may or may not exist, but who is there to come to the aid of God's people and to give them protection.

We find examples of what the golem means in literature, so for instance in Great Expectations, Miss Havisham has the characteristics of a golem. Although she only appears two or three times in the novel, yet she is there as the unseen controlling influence on Pip throughout. He can't get away from the unforgettable encounter with this woman jilted on her wedding day, confined to her darkened room still clothed in her wedding dress with the banquet laid out on the table and cobwebs covering everything.

A second literary example is Mrs Rochester in Jane Eyre, who may or may not exist despite the strange noises from above – she is found finally to do so as she is consumed by fire in the attic, but she, as an unseen presence, controls the whole story.

Or we might think of Rebecca in Daphne du Maurier's novel of the same name. She doesn't exist – she's dead after all- but despite that still controls all that happens in the book.

And it's not just women! The ghost of Hamlet's father, again hardly appearing in the play, nonetheless controls the whole plot, as for that matter do the witches in Macbeth.

What on earth has this to do with us, worshipping on this Sunday. Well our Acts lesson had a form of Golem in the man from Macedonia, his sole appearance, and that in a dream. Yet, he makes all the difference. It's only because of him that Paul proceeds from Asia to Europe, that the gospel message goes west. And in our Gospel reading the Holy Spirit is promised. And we could see the Spirit as a form of golem – unseen, real or not, yet again the one who directs and controls the action of the church from its infancy onwards. God is a spirit (John 4:23).

We can and most of the time do, live our lives quite oblivious of God's continual presence with us, God the golem, the spirit who accompanies us. But the idea of the golem gave me a little insight into how that may be, how what seems small, insignificant, hidden just as is the case with the literary examples I've quoted, can actually make all the difference. God is like a golem, like the sound of silence which underlies everything and may of course be just a figment of our imaginations, but can be, as we find out in our lives, the source of life, truth and the hope which sustains us through the testing and sometimes almost overwhelming things that life and the world throw at us. We are upheld by what we can't see but what we can know in experience to be the most real thing of all – God.