26th May 2026

Escape

"Our soul is escaped, even as a bird out of the snare …"

Bible, Psalm 124:6

Two stories … Firstly, there was a woodpigeon in the Crematorium. No one knew when it had sneaked in or how long it had been there. It must have gate-crashed the funeral by slipping in among the grieving mourners, but nobody knew when. Indeed, it could have hidden itself away for ages before it made its appearance.

And what an appearance it was! It swooped from the organ gallery during the first hymn and hopped about between verses. It took a stance in front the catafalque when scripture was being read. It dive-bombed a lady with a fancy hat during the thanksgiving prayer. It cooed loudly at the end of the eulogy. It pecked the centre aisle carpet, searching for titbits during the Committal. For most people, the only thing they would remember about Uncle Willie's funeral was a recalcitrant woodpigeon.

Story number two … High up in the apex of the east wall of Iona Abbey, way above the marble Communion Table and the arched window, there's a little square opening. It's glassed over now for the comfort of the congregation, but originally, in mediaeval times, it would have been open to the elements. For this opening, common to all grand cathedrals in the middle-ages, is a "bird window". Given that a bird trapped inside a building will fly to the highest point of light, the cathedral builders designed an escape route for any bird that entered the building.

A bird's purpose isn't inside a building, grand or otherwise. It's outside in the world, through the bird window, free of restrictions. Perhaps the crematorium should have had a bird window to allow a trapped woodpigeon a way back to the world of freedom it was designed to enjoy.

In the Season of Pentecost, when we remember the Holy Spirit in our midst, we need a bird-window in our churches. For do we want to trap the Spirit of God inside our buildings, discomforting, disturbing, and disrupting? Or do we want that Spirit to escape, to get back to the world in which it belongs, to be free of restrictions, to soar and swoop as it was made to do? And … might we follow that Spirit into the world, escaping any snares and restrictions *we* experience, to find a new freedom too?

A prayer for today

The Holy Spirit is alive and well. Can I find the freedom it offers? Amen

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