



SERMON - Wed 5th June '24 **Boniface (Wynfryth)**

Boniface was not born with that name, but he was given it by the then Pope in the 7th Century and it means 'One who does good' But he was first given the name 'Wynfrith' and I understand this means 'Friend of Peace', possibly because he was the son of a Saxon father and his Mother was a Briton as it was then known. But what a wonderful pair of names! He

became Bishop of Crediton and then spent much of his life bringing the Gospel to what were then known as Frankish lands - Germany and France and etc. For some 300 years he was recognised as Patron Saint of England and I sort of feel that as a local born Briton he has more credentials for that than our current Saint George! but... that is a whole other story!

Boniface might have chosen to stay in his comfortable life as a senior Bishop in what was a mainly Christian land, but in his heart was a desire to take the Gospel that he had preached so effectively in Britain to places where as yet that message had not gained a real foothold, amongst those places being the Frankish Empire, where he would convert the father of the man who would become the first 'Holy Roman Emperor', which empire would stand for nearly 1000 years, and also to Frisia - a very pagan place back then. His first visit there saw little success and so, again when he might have stayed where he was and lived out his life, he went back there with a group of fellow Christian evangelists as I guess we should call them today, and there they were all killed by a band of brigands. But by then though the work he had done amongst many of the political and military leaders in what would become Europe had set the foundations for the Gospel to flourish for centuries everywhere he had worked.

Paul, as he opens his second letter to his 'Spiritual Son' Timothy, talks to the young man about his own calling and mission to spread the Gospel (the same Good News as Boniface would take with him everywhere he went) and to take it wherever people would hear and listen and respond, and to those places where it would encounter opposition and where Paul's life would be endangered and his freedom curtailed.

But for both these Evangelists, despite the centuries that separated them, their motivation for taking the Gospel of Christ wherever they could was the same. And Paul is careful to share this with Timothy, who was at the beginning of his own life of service to that same Good News.

Paul is also very careful to say that what drove him to share his testimony with any and all he could and who he met along the way, whether they were simple gatherings of 'Followers of the Way' or Roman and Local Rulers, and open day even the Emperor himself - what drove him on to share with all of them what God had done for Paul was not to be found within his own self - his abilities or character - but it was God's Grace that sent him out and that drew him onwards.

So when Paul, or Boniface, preached or taught they did not preach or talk about themselves! That is not the nature of a true Christian Testimony! It was not an opportunity to tell his listeners all about his own great Mission or about where he had been and what he had done or even what he was. No!

Paul encourages Timothy to share all that God in Christ has done and is doing for Paul! And Paul goes on to tell his protégé never to be ashamed to share this wonderful work that God had done in his life but (and this is an odd thing to ask a young man to do!) to share in Paul's own suffering for the Gospel, and not to seek the praise of mere human beings, but to bear witness to God's Grace in Christ!

Timothy, we can deduce from our reading today, had been commissioned by Paul in some ceremonial 'Laying on of Hands' and prayer through which the young man had received a Divine Gift (A gift of and from the Holy Spirit) but Paul feels the need to remind Timothy of this and to encourage him to exercise that gift. Timothy, in age and experience, was young and perhaps he felt brow-beaten by those that considered themselves his elders and betters. Maybe Timothy was a naturally quiet young man who felt obliged to respect his elders, and indeed, elsewhere Paul does also encourage him not to be afraid of such people and not let them 'Despise his youth'

Sharing of our 'Testimonies' is at the heart of the commission that we, along with Paul, Timothy and Boniface are entrusted with. We are commissioned, like Timothy, to share the story of what God has done for us. We are not commissioned to be Theologians (though they do have their place - an important place in helping Christians to grow in their Faith - as teachers of the Word) but we are sent to testify to God's Goodness towards us, and the story of our own Salvation, which God in Christ provided for us before we even knew that we needed it and which we celebrate round this Table!

There is a suggestion that some Christian Leaders of Paul's day were abandoning Paul and belittling his ministry. Paul was suffering for preaching the Gospel, and some saw this both as a sign that God had stepped back from Paul - and that such a wonderful message as the Gospel should not be associated with failure, which, with Paul in prison or under house-arrest, was how they saw Paul's ministry as failing. But God's abounding Grace is not something to be ashamed of, but rather, something to share and declare even through suffering, which Paul very much understood as sharing with Christ in His suffering, for the sake of the Gospel! It's not about us, but it is about Christ in Us, the hope of Glory!' or as Paul puts it, which the hymn writer picked up and ran with...

*I know not why God's wondrous grace -
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.*

*Refrain:
But "I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day."*

*I know not how this saving faith
To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.*

*I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.*

*I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see.*

*I know not when my Lord may come,
At night or noontide fair,
Nor if I walk the vale with Him,
Or meet Him in the air.*

AMEN