

Year B St Kentigern/St Mungo

Isaiah 52: 7-10

1 Thessalonians 2: 2-12

Matthew 28: 16-20

Dear One

Today we remember St Mungo, the Patron saint of this church. From the various histories of his life, we know he travelled across central Scotland a number of times, and there are various wells named after him, and subsequently churches. He also travelled around Dumfries and Galloway and into Cumbria, and possibly further south, into Wales.

Our first reading is from Isaiah 52 where the poetic statement is made, 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news...' Can we imagine Mungo tramping along the Roman Road, having come across the Lanarkshire hills down to West Linton, to scoop up some water to slake his thirst from the river we now call the Lyne? Can we imagine the conversations he may have had on his way, with farm workers, owners of homesteads and owners of larger portions of land.

Given that although his name was Kentigern, he was called Mungo, which translates to something close to 'Dear One', we can only imagine that he was respected, well-loved by the people, and greeted with warmth wherever he went. It would have been a pleasure rather than a duty to provide that particular traveller hospitality.

In our reading from Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica, he makes clear that his mission of spreading the good news of Christ is not about personal aggrandisement or seeking the acclamation of the people. No, his ministry is about showing God's love and wishing to care for others, acting like a father does with his children, 'encouraging, comforting and urging to live lives worthy of God'. He

calls these people witnesses to the life he and his own followers lead, a life he calls holy, righteous, and blameless.

In our Gospel reading from Matthew, we have the last words of that Gospel, where Jesus gives the disciples his 'Great Commission', to go and make disciples of all nations. We can understand why this text was chosen, as Mungo was reputed to have travelled widely and was always ready to offer a good word and be a good evangelist. For so many places to be named after him, not just in Scotland but in Cumbria too (Mungrisdale, for instance) gives us a small insight as to the tremendous impact he had on the people whose lands he travelled through.

I suspect his telling of the good news was compelling because his faith was rooted in showing kindness and caring for all whom he met. Given his upbringing in Culross, we know he was well taught by St Serf and his actions would have been deeply grounded in scripture.

I believe it was Mungo's upbringing and education by St Serf, that shaped his character. He was undoubtedly given the gift of compassion and understanding, and when mixed with his religious education and desire to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to others, he was a truly effective evangelist.

And I come back to his nickname – Mungo – 'dear one', that stuck with him throughout his long life. That nickname would not have stayed with him if his character had not been constant, rather than being a short phase of his youth, wishing to please his tutor, Serf. A bit like the house built on solid foundations rather than on sand, Mungo's character does not appear to have changed when buffeted by life's challenges, trials, and tribulations.

Two Sunday's ago, as we celebrated the naming of Jesus/ Joshua/ Yeshua/ He Who Saves / Saviour, I asked what name we would like to adopt this year, that would help us and remind us of our role as followers of the way of Christ. I suggested we may wish to consider

the fruit of the spirit for inspiration: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Maybe we should add 'dear one' to the list, and contemplate what quality we need for this year, and also use the example of Mungo's life to help us let this not be a skin-deep quality, but one that we inhabit in the core of our being.

May we seek to be like Mungo, to be a 'dear one' to each other and to all others we meet, as we follow the way of Christ each and every day of our lives.

Nick Bowry

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