

The Late Bill May.

If you were asked to draw a symbolic map of Bill May's life, a single map would not do. You would need several. Firstly, you would have to create a map of the British Isles, and as Nick has already said, you would need to highlight the fishing villages of north-east Scotland...because that was Bill's family's home. As a member of the Naughty Boys Club, Bill frequently regaled us with the dialect words of those isolated communities...words like 'Quinie' (girl) and 'Loon', (boy) and 'hoast (cough) which had a stronger connection with Norway than the rest of the UK. And of course, we were also the recipients of Bill's love of puns and his delight in the corniest of corny jokes.

Then, secondly, you would need another map, incorporating Woking and Charing Cross and Wiltshire and Camberley, to capture Bill's early life as a child and teenager and young medic...

And then, the next map would be one which included every street in The Bourne...and if you marked that map with dots to represent all the roads and lanes in which Bill had patients you would find that the map would be absolutely covered...

And then the next and final map would be one which featured his house and surgery on Frensham Road and his and Sally's retirement house in Latchwood Lane, plus St Martin's Church ...

But as I was writing this sermon, at this point the metaphor of drawing maps completely broke down, because no map could adequately capture Bill's enormous, enormous love for Sally, the children and their grandchildren; no map could adequately capture Bill's gentle friendships, his love of music, his ethical values, and his wise and profoundly caring professionalism as a GP. He was the very model of what makes a good GP. He had the gift of humility which enabled him to listen... and that listening was rooted in love, but it was not a sentimental love, rather, it was a love which was unbreakably intertwined with truth. And therefore, it was strong and resulted in Bill being able to give us his patients complete attention. And that, I guess, (and it can only be a guess) was more exhausting than any of us realized. Only you, Sally, and the family will know.

And so no map, no matter how many, nor how carefully drawn, could capture the depth and breadth of Bill's love for the family, nor could a two dimensional map capture the essence of his Christian faith

If you want a Biblical text which captures some of the roots of Bill's faith, try these verses written to the young church at Ephesus:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace Ephesians 4, 1-3

Bill's faith was not something about which he talked a great deal, but that it was important to him cannot be denied. His faith was held with a kind of courteous reticence... and in an age when noise and putting it out there seem to be so highly prized, (isn't the concept of a celebrity influencer, completely and utterly vacuous?), the reticence of Bill's faith was, for me, deeply engaging.

And I want to suggest, that the virtues of reticence and courtesy are part of the very Being of God and should be taken seriously.

Think of it like this: it took thirty years of silence before Jesus spoke; it took St Paul, over 10 years of silence after his Damascus road conversion before he began his missionary journeys. And as for the 12 disciples, there is hardly any mention in the Bible after Jesus' death of what people like Thaddaeus did, or even, come to that what Mary, Jesus' mother, did.

But within the Church at the current time, this notion of courtesy and reticence goes against the grain. We are frequently urged to talk about our faith...but what if, like Bill, we took the courteous silence of God seriously? Does not God's silence come from God's loving desire to give us the space to think and ponder for ourselves? Does not God's silence provide the means for us to discover, ethically, what we ought to do? Does not God's silence, give us the freedom we need to stumble our way towards to maturity?

And did not the precious gift of wisdom which Bill had, grow out of his thoughtful, courteous, reticent faith

But, as you will all know, Bill, self-effacingly and courteously enriched our lives. He was a central figure in the life of The Bourne. He, with Sally, (two people whom we could trust completely) carried within his heart and soul our frailties and our challenges, and in his latter years, even in the midst of his own illness, he retained his gentle, courageous wit and human thoughtfulness.

And so, with all of you, I thank you, Sally, Nick, Sara, Alex and all the family, including David, for allowing the rest of us to share so much of Bill's life...to have known him was simply (and completely) a blessing. May he rest in peace and rise in glory...

The Rt Revd Christopher Herbert.

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