

Thought for the day – 24th May, 2021 – Richard Wilson (St Chad's)

Commemoration of John and Charles Wesley

It is right that we should commemorate these two brothers for between them they founded Methodism and wrote an extraordinary number of hymns. However the Family of the Wesleys were religious, musical and very forthright, holding very strong views not always agreeing with the Anglican Church of which they were members.

Their great grandfather **Bartholomew**(b.1596) and his son **John** were ejected from their livings. **Samuel** (1662-1735), John's younger son and the brothers' father, was appointed **Rector of Epworth** in Lincolnshire in 1695, and is buried in Epworth churchyard. **John** (1703-1791) the 15th of 19 children and **Charles** (1707-1791) the 18th were born in Epworth and died in London.

In 1712 whilst **Samuel** was away, his wife **Susanna**(1669-1742) held classes for parishioners which upset the curate. Samuel told Susanna to stop them but she replied that he would have to explain his reasons on judgement day so the meetings resumed. Is this where John got his first ideas of Methodism?

John had an evangelical conversion, near Bristol in May 1738 and preached his first open air sermon in April 1739. He formally began to allow women to preach in Methodism in 1771. One quote from him is *'Once in seven years I burn all my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I did seven years ago. Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness. Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.'*

Charles was the great hymn-writer of the Wesley family, and perhaps, of all ages. He is said to have written no less than 6500 hymns. As only John knew German all translations of hymns are attributed to him and those he is known to have written.

Both **John** and **Charles** were well educated and went to Christ Church, Oxford. They spent 1735/6 in Georgia as missionaries of the S.P.G.(I curtailed adding more details of their life).

After **Charles** died his widow and orphans were treated with the greatest kindness and generosity by **John**.

Charles's children included another **Samuel Wesley** (1766-1837) composer and organist who helped introduce the music of J.S. Bach into England. He became one of the finest organists and extemporizers of his time. This **Samuel** had a son also called Samuel but known as **Samuel Sebastian** (1810-1876), again an organist and composer, to avoid confusion. He was appointed to Hereford and Exeter Cathedrals, Leeds Minster (1842), Winchester and Gloucester Cathedrals.

I counted 14 well-known hymns in one hymn book including 'Rejoice the Lord is King', 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending', 'Love divine, all loves excelling' & 'Hark! The herald angels sing'.

The two brothers do need commemorating for this tremendous amount of work and show how God has worked through the extended family.