

17th October 2021

Bold

“Boldness is an ill keeper of promise.”

Francis Bacon, Essay, 'Of Boldness'

John Ernest Bode was an Anglican priest, teacher, poet and hymn-writer. Born in London and educated at Eton, he became Rector of Westwell in Oxfordshire in 1847 before moving to Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire, in 1860. In 1869, he presided at the Confirmation of his two sons and daughter in Castle Camps. So moved was he to lead worship where his children made a faith commitment, that he wrote a hymn specially for the occasion. That hymn has come to us as *O Jesus, I have promised*.

Originally set to the melody “Angel’s Story” by Arthur Mann, formerly of King’s College Cambridge, it’s now more commonly sung to “Thornbury” by Basil Harwood or “Wolvercote” by William Ferguson, both early 20th century melodies. But however and wherever it is sung, John Bode’s hymn is a powerful testimony to the boldness of faith.

*O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.*

*O let me hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen, thou guardian of my soul.*

*O Jesus, thou hast promised to all who follow thee
that where thou art in glory there shall thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my friend.*

Some of you reading this won’t subscribe to a Christian belief system. I wonder, however, if all of us might not be the better for going back to an act Confirmation of the children of this Rector, to marvel at the boldness of their convictions and the power of their father’s hymn. Francis Bacon might believe that “boldness is an ill keeper of promise”. But with a promise of faith such as this, should we not admire how bold people can be, and rejoice in the confirmation of a promise such as this?

A prayer for today

Lord, I promise to be bold today – at least bold enough to follow my convictions. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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