

Final 8.30am Sermon by the Revd Martin Tanner in St Mary's Church, Market Drayton on Sunday 15th January 2017

BCP Purple Passages

THIS IS THE LAST TIME I take a Book of Common Prayer (BCP) Communion Service in St Mary's. Since 2008 I have done so about 600 times!

So, as I retire as Vicar, let us remind ourselves of some its GLORIES, but first, some of its HISTORY:

In 1535, 1539 and 1545 Henry VIII published three "Primers" which were **"things which a Christian ought to know"** and so they included the Lord's Prayer, the 10 Commandments, The Creed and various prayers and Bible Readings.

The author of these Primers was, almost certainly, Thomas Cranmer who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1532 to 1556.

These were a deliberate attempt to improve the Christian knowledge of the people of England. Further, in 1544 Cranmer published his "Litany" which is basically the one still included in the BCP today.

These four books are the basis of the Book of Common Prayer. Meanwhile, since the Convocation Meeting of 1542, "A Committee of Eight" had been reviewing the Service Books of the Church.

Then Henry VIII died in January 1547 and things then moved on a pace. Edward 6th became the new King aged 9 years. Unable, as a Minor, to rule in his own right, this gave Cranmer enormous power as one of the Kings Chief Advisors.

The Sacrament Act was passed in November 1547 which directed that the people must receive both the Bread and the Wine and were not to be denied the Chalice ('except necessity require' eg Plague).

Then the Clergy were allowed to marry. But, interestingly, any children born from such a permitted marriage were deemed illegitimate until 1603!

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In 1548 an "Order of the Communion" as it was called was published and then in 1549 the Prayer Book, the First Prayer Book of Edward 6th, was published.

It was all a bit like Series 1, Series 2, Series 3 in the 1970's finally becoming the ASB in the 1980's!

The Prayer Book evolved from both history and experiment.

The clever thing the Reformers did was to combine four books into one.

The Pre-Reformation Church had a BREVIARY which was the book of the daily services, Morning & Evening Prayer and all the others; The MISSAL was the book for Communion, The Mass; The RITUAL was the book of Occasional Offices: Baptism, Marriage, Funerals and The PONTIFICAL was the book the Bishops only used, for Confirmation and Ordination.

Cranmer edited them all down to ONE convenient VOLUME that could be easily carried about and was accessible and easy to use.

The First Prayer Book was used from Whitsun 1549 to All Saints Day 1552 when the Second Prayer Book of Edward 6th replaced it. Fourteen months later Queen Mary repealed it.

The Third Prayer, that of Elizabeth 1st, came into being in 1559.

On her death, King James convened a Conference at Hampton Court at which the Puritans put their case for revision but only the smallest changes were made. The defeat of King Charles at the Battle of Naseby changed everything and in 1645 Parliament, under Cromwell, repealed the Acts of Parliament that had established the various Prayer Books.

In 96 years there had been three Prayer Books. Then, in 1662, after Cromwell's death and the Restoration of Charles II the present Book of Common Prayer saw the light of day.

Only 106 years after Cranmer died at The Stake!

The BCP has an amazing history.

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The Clergy had to "Assent" that they would use it and no other form of Service. Those who would not assent were known as the "Dissenters" and had to leave the C of E.

And so to some of its 'Purple Passages':

The Collect for the Sovereign

And that we, and all her subjects, may faithfully serve, honour and humbly obey her, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance

Here is something more politically radical than any party would ever propose.

We not only serve our Ruler but we also honour and obey our Ruler. WOW! And why? "In thee and For thee" We do so FOR GOD. Double Wow!

Here is the antidote to a "Me First" society, a "Me First" culture. Here is a re-ordering of our lives. God first, my country, my community second and me last.

Here is a radical alternative that would solve so many problems caused by selfishness. It shows that Scripture is for practical living, for daily life, '*according to thy blessed Word and ordinance*'

Response to the Sursam Corda

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty,
that we should **at all times, and in all places**, give thanks to thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.

What is our duty?

The worship of God AT ALL TIMES and IN ALL PLACES.

Nothing is more simple.

Nothing is more profound.

JEWS can't hold a Prayer Meeting unless 10 Men are present!

But JESUS said, "*If two or three gather in my Name, there I am in the midst of them*"

Our thanks and praise, our worship of God is not restricted to a certain day or certain buildings.

The Prayer Book teaches us to worship God "at all times and in all places" **The whole of our life should be an offering to God.**

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The Prayer of Humble Access

But thou art the same Lord, whose PROPERTY is always to have mercy ...

We like something because of its good or pleasing properties. If you 'right click' something on your computer Windows will tell you its properties. But what is more important than GOD'S properties?

The BCP, harking back to the Prophets, teaches us that we have a MERCIFUL GOD who loves and forgives where he sees a genuine desire to know him and live for him.

Without mercy we are lost. For God is holy and we are not.
SO, and this is one of the great questions of the ages,
How can we come into the presence of a holy God?

ONLY if GOD is merciful and forgiving.
AND ONLY if he arranges the means of our forgiveness.

The Communion Service is all about remembering and entering into **how God**, through sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for us, **DID arrange** the means of our forgiveness and thus reveal his mercy to us.

We must be ever mindful of the property of God which is mercy.

The Prayer of Consecration

who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption;

HERE is the heart of the Reformation.
Here is the centre of a Biblical faith.
Here is the essence of Salvation.
Here is our hope of Heaven.
HERE IS THE ESSENCE OF EVERYTHING CHRISTIAN.

I try to say the following clause in one breath:
"to suffer death upon the Cross for our Redemption"

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The word "redemption" comes from the slave world.

A slave is owned by a Master.

The slave can only be free if he can be redeemed from that Master.

In theory a slave could redeem themselves. BUT as a slave owns nothing, he has nothing by which he can redeem himself. If his freedom is to be bought, **it must be bought by another.**

This is exactly what Jesus has done for us.

His death on the Cross is the price for our redemption, our freedom.

Christ becomes our new Master.

No longer are we slaves to sin

But slaves of Christ. He is our new Master. He is Lord.

And if we are in any doubt about this, the BCP continues in language that leaves no room for any doubt:

His death is "a FULL, PERFECT and SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

Finally, The Blessing

The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding,

PEACE is the product of Grace and Mercy and the love of God.

It is the result of faith in Christ.

The Blessing of faith is knowing this gift of peace and experiencing it in our daily lives.

If faith is to mean anything we should be people at Peace with God, at Peace with ourselves and at Peace with one another.

When are at peace, when we have found peace and purpose in life, when we have hope in our hearts, **we are truly blessed.**

We need to keep these things, the knowledge and love of God and his Son Jesus Christ, in our hearts and minds. In our thoughts and in our being.

They are not just for Church.

They are for life.

They are for 'always'.

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So, finally, **it is significant** that the final word the Vicar says in the Blessing is 'ALWAYS'

To which you say, "Amen"

Amen!

May you all know this 'peace which passeth all understanding',
always.

**And, you will *IF* you keep the purple passages of the BCP
ever before you!**