

Bread of Life: Bishops' teaching series

7: Anticipation (eschatological hope) - Bishop Alistair Magowan

Introduction

In this series on the Eucharist, we come today to that aspect of looking forward. Our theme is that of anticipation or what often been known as Eschatological or future hope. This is the seventh in the series of nine themes based on the Methodist report, 'His Presence Makes the Feast'.

As our creed make clear, a vital part of our faith is that we look for His (Jesus) coming in glory... and we might add to our participation in it. The Lord's supper as St Paul calls it contains clear wordings of thanksgiving/blessing (eucharist) and communion (koinonia) with its proclamation of Christ's passion as we look to the fulfilment and the coming of his Kingdom. These were fundamental and central to Christian worship from the beginning. We will return to these themes shortly.

I want however to recount a couple of stories personal to me. The first is from my childhood and regular Sunday worship. There was in that congregation a lovely old man who almost every week with a twinkle in his eye would say... "isn't that wonderful it is one more and one less". He had his eye on the future and the twinkle in his eye said it all. The second is from my time in Durham. Again, a dear old saint of a lady used to say to me in every eucharist that she saw, with her mind's eye of faith, her being with the company of heaven and believers she had known who were now in his nearer presence. In the liturgy when we used the words "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven..." it was as if she was already there.

The eucharist, like great works of art or music contains great depth. There is always something more to be grasped. It is not insignificant that the Latin Sacramentum has its parallel in the Greek word *mysterium*. While not quite mystery in the modern sense it embodies much of the sense of unfathomable depth in its meaning. The wonder and beauty of bread and wine is that a child can understand it and the wisest of sages never fully plumb its depths.

The Oxford English dictionary defines eschatology as the doctrine of death, judgment, heaven and hell and its connection to their present significance for the Christian life. The Eucharist, perhaps more than in any other act of worship speaks to every one of those four aspects. It gives future hope to all who by faith feed on Christ; for through Him death is defeated, judgment turns from guilty to forgiven, hell is vanquished and heaven is secured.

The Scriptures:

To grasp this a bit more, we will look at 4 relevant scriptures and I want to begin in what is perhaps an unusual place with Exodus 25:40: God instructs Moses; *And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.* Exodus is quoted in the New Testament both in Acts 7:44 and Hebrews 8:5.

The point to note in relation to our theme is that our temporal acts of worship bound by space and time have a greater reality beyond space and time from which they derive and connect. Again, there is here something of mystery. The mosaic worshippers were made conscious of a connection with the eternal and spiritual.

For us also, we join with the living God and the company of heaven and while we remain in this mortal life hold the promise of a better future made possible as by God's own provision of the means of atonement.

Indeed, the idea of a better future and a heavenly banquet is alluded to in a number of Old Testament passages. Heavenly is not to be understood as some ethereal ghostly existence but of a new creation order more solid and real. A good example is Isaiah 25:6-9:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Turning to the institution of the eucharist. The earliest recorded New Testament evidence of the tradition comes from St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 probably written in the mid 50's AD. This is at the very least a decade earlier than any of the synoptic gospel accounts.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

St Paul recounts this as 'received from the Lord'. The word St Paul uses is literally 'handed on' and in what may be a word play when he writes of the Lord on that night of betrayal being

literally 'handed over'. What the Apostle is emphasising is that he is passing on a direct and living tradition that goes right back to the Passover meal where Jesus, with his disciples, inaugurates the New Covenant in his blood. The liturgical elements and four-fold acts are present, namely; take, bless (thanksgiving), break (fraction) and sharing(participation).

St Paul beautifully crafts the context of the Lord's Supper / Eucharist. It is a 'Remembering', a looking back to the Cross, Passion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a 'Proclaiming' that is preaching and a declaration in the present to ourselves and others of the efficacy of the atoning work of Christ. It is an 'Eschatological feast' looking forward, ... until he comes...that is his sure return to make all things new. Prof Thistleton in his Commentary on I Corinthians writes in relation to the words, 'Until he Comes':

Pledges, promises and covenantal signs give assurance of faith precisely for the period when believers live by faith and are in need of such assurances and tokens.

The now, whatever the joys or sadness life brings is anchored by the secure saving work of the cross and resurrection and by faith the anticipation to all who receive of a sure eschatological hope of sharing in the resurrection.

Luke 22:14-20:

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Each of the Synoptic gospels record the events of the last supper and Jesus' inauguration of the Eucharist in the context of the Passover meal. They vary in certain details especially on the sequence and timings of the blessings of cup and bread. Nolland in his thorough commentary and drawing on extensive reading of scholarly debate points of divergence, concludes that Luke draws on Mark and expands it giving it a more liturgical structure. He further shows how v15-17 relate to the Passover with cup and lamb and verses 19-20 relate to the new with cup and bread. There is between these two sections Jesus words about not drinking from the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes. On this, Nolland writes:

"it seems we must be content to see here simply the anticipation of the eschatological banquet of the Kingdom of God. (it is likely that already in Jesus time Passover did not only look back to redemption from Egypt but also to the eschatological redemption to come...:

To summarise, these scriptures lead us to anticipation for:

- In the Eucharist there is a *proclaiming* of the saving work of the cross and triumph of the resurrection the sure anchor of our anticipated and future security before God.
- There is in these temporal acts a *living connection* to the Heavenly unseen more real reality of the nearer presence of God already around us.
- The Kingdom of God through Jesus is already both here and to come, now and not yet in its fulness. We feast at His table now with the fulness of the heavenly banquet our anticipation
- The *future promises* the fullness of the Kingdom, the new creation and the resurrection of our bodies to eternal life.
- Therefore, we are to frame our lives and manner of living in the light of these great truths.

The Early Church Fathers

There isn't sufficient time here to look at them in detail. However, J.N. D. Kelly in his classic work on early Christian doctrines illuminates how the early church developed in its understanding and indeed of the divergence and varieties of emphasises present, as doctrine and practice travelled towards Nicaea. This was certainly so in relation to the Eucharist among the Pre Nicene fathers. Justin and Irenaeus had differing views on the nature of the sacraments and of the conception of the Eucharist. Both were familiar with the important Greek word *Mysterium* as well as its Latin counterpart *Sacramentum*. As we noted earlier in using the word *Mysterium* they recognised that they were grappling to touch that which was beyond words.

'Do this ... in memory of me' (*touto poiete*) would have had a sense to them of: 'offer this'. As to what is to be offered that was a journey in the early centuries. What was clear was the importance of the offering of prayer, thanksgiving and their lives to the service of God. Also, they were clear of the sure foundation of the atoning sacrifice of Christ as pascal lamb on the cross and of the bread and wine as pledges and *medicine for immortality*, a means of grace and antidote against death which enables us to live with the Lord forever.

Although there were differences there was agreement that the gifts of bread and wine, the sacrifice of prayer and praise and offering of our lives all contained anticipatory longing for the heavenly banquet.

The Reformers

Griffith Thomas writing on Eucharistic understanding of sacrifice among the reformers, perhaps more than any other, sets out the reformed and protestant position:

He writes:

What seems quite clear is that the Eucharist was regarded as commemorative of the death of Christ and in this sense a commemorative sacrifice. The idea of gifts of bread and wine by the faithful and the sacrifice of prayer and praise, and the offering of the communicants themselves were of course kept in view, and the

thought of the Holy Communion as a memorial of Christ's sacrifice was made especially prominent.

He later quoting a Bishop Bilson writes "The Lord's Table, in respect of His graces and mercies there proposed to us, is a heavenly banquet, which we must eat and not sacrifice."

What is striking across the millennia and the differing understandings, uses of certain words and terminology, each rooted in specific contexts and diversities of cultures, is the common aspect of the anticipation of the Eschatological longing and anticipation expressed as heavenly banquet. We are a people of longing looking forward.

A more recent writer the late Revd David Watson wrote:

Not least, this fellowship meal should be a foretaste of heaven. We remember that at best it is only a shadow of the marriage feast of the Lamb. With our hope fixed on the glory that is waiting for us we do not lose heart with the 'slight momentary afflictions' of this present time. If at this moment our joys are mingled with tears, we take courage at this fellowship meal that one day God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Until that glorious day, we remain a community of God's people, members of his household, encouraging and serving one another, renewed daily by God's love, as we work together for the Kingdom of God.

Liturgical texts

I hope this background will help as we look at liturgical texts and provisions in relation to the theme and place of anticipation and the eschatological hope set in the Eucharist.

The Book of Common Prayer:

For us Anglicans, the Book of Common Prayer remains the foundation text. A close look at the BCP Communion liturgy reveals an emphasis which coheres with the quote from Bishop Bilson. Nevertheless, it is sparse in relation to the Eschatological. The wording of "with angels and archangel and all the company of heaven" is set, not in the eucharistic prayer as celebration and expectation but, in the preparatory prefaces and before the prayer of humble access. The emphasis is strongly on the penitential and the requirements to be in a right frame with God and neighbour and to have examined oneself before reception. This is a looking in with the heavenly host more a company of witness's looking on rather than a great crowd of witnesses cheering us on in anticipation to finish the race. The Eucharistic prayer again simply echoes the words of St Paul in the briefest manner. The focus of the prayer is the cross with explanation of its atoning efficacy. The consequence is that the prayer calling the faithful to a 'perpetual' memory of his precious death until his coming again. The word 'perpetual' probably deliberately leaves open the full nature of the prayer of consecration in the light of what were the debates of the previous century and the revisions from previous prayer book forms. The most pronounced anticipatory words are in the proper prefaces for Easter and Ascension Day.

More recent liturgical texts and with what I hope we have seen is good biblical warrant afford a much clearer and more deliberate place to the eschatological. The with Angles and archangels... is now in the Eucharist prayer itself. The company of heaven are as in Hebrews 12:1-2 with Jesus the pioneer who has gone ahead and is making ready for us. For example, Eucharist prayer B in Common Worship calls us to both look back to the institution in the upper room and the cross but also to look forward to the coming kingdom of our God. Its use of the words 'being gathered in' contains both a present activity and a future fulfilment. Prayer D contains explicit words of the heavenly banquet "May we all who share this food offer our lives to you and be welcomed at your feast in heaven where all creation worships you Father Son and Holy Spirit"

Similarly, Prayer E "and bring us with (N) and all the saints to feast at your table in heaven."

Prayer F and G similarly in the prayers of consecration both look back to the enactment of the Lords Supper and looking forward to the final consummation of all things.

Prayer G is perhaps the fullest:

Bring us at the last with (N and) all the saints to the vision of that eternal splendour for which you have created us through Jesus Christ our Lord by whom, with who and in whom with all who stand before you in earth and heaven we worship you Father almighty in songs of everlasting praise.

As well as the wording in the prayers of consecration Common Worship provides in the proper prefaces, seasonal material and poet communion prayers a rich variety of material that enables us as we go out into the world to set our compasses both wit the cross behind us and hope before us.

John Wesley:

So far, we have explored this theme looking at scripture, doctrine and liturgy. However, faith is not simply the voicing of precious words or even the understanding with our minds the great truths of the faith. It is fundamentally and essentially the response of the heart and will. Expectation and devotion are intrinsically bound together. I began with reference to the Methodist report 'His Presence makes the Feast.' The Wesleys and John in particular were quite innovative in their use of hymnody and the importance of the response of the heart. While it is something of a caricature there is truth in the sentiment that if Anglicanism is founded on the Prayer Book and Thirty Nine Articles, Methodism is upon its hymns. Methodism, through the use of hymns enabled the faithful to learn doctrine and express devotion. They were essentially liturgical, a *lex orandi, lex credendi*. For Methodists, it was 'what we sing is what we believe and how we then live'. John Wesley encouraged regular attendance at the Holy Communion as vital and so were the many communion hymns penned by the Wesleys.

Holy Communion for many in the Great Awakening of the 18th century was a converting ordinance before it was a confirming ordinance. The Lord's Supper was ordained by God as a means of conveying prevenient, justifying or sanctifying grace. How the believer is to live was firmly set with the cross, resurrection and Pentecost behind and great and final Glorious Day ahead. Holy Communion and the gathering around the Lord's table was and is the place of encounter with the living presence of Jesus, a memorial of his passion, an essential place for the amendment of life and a reception of grace in anticipation of glory. Believers were to expect it to be a place of divine encounter full of doxological awe and wonder. To use slightly archaic language, it was a trysting place where heaven and earth meet. Holy Communion was not just a pledge but a genuine foretaste with the future in the present and fullness of what is to come promised in bread and wine. Holy Communion is to be a genuine Eschatological feast.

It can be all too easy for us to become so familiar with the Eucharist that perhaps its riches lose their lustre. Our weekly or daily gatherings can at times feel very earth bound. Contemplating again the words 'until he comes' and 'where two or three gather in my name there am I in the midst' can only be good for our souls.

Where better to close than with a Wesley hymn. There are many possibilities but this one I think says much of what we have been considering.

Come let us join with one accord
Who share the Supper of the Lord,
Our Lord and Master's praise to sing,
Nourished on earth with living bread
We now are at his table fed,
But wait to see our heavenly King;
To see the great invisible
Without a sacramental veil,
With all his robes of glory on,
In rapt'rous joy and love and praise
Him to behold with open face,
High on his everlasting throne.

2 The wine which doth his Passion show,
We soon with him shall drink it new
In yonder dazzling courts above,
Admitted to the heavenly feast
We shall his choicest blessings taste,
And banquet on his richest love.
We soon the midnight cry shall hear,
Arise, and meet the Bridegroom near,
The marriage of the Lamb is come,
Attended by his heavenly friends

The glorious King of saints descends
To take his bride in triumph home.

3 Then let us still in hope rejoice,
And listen for th' archangel's voice
Loud-echoing to the trump of God,
Haste to the dreadful joyful day,
When heaven and earth shall flee away
By all-devouring flames destroyed:
While we from out the burnings fly,
With eagles' wings mount up on high,
Where Jesus is on Sion seen;
'Tis there he for our coming waits,
And lo, the everlasting gates
Lift up their heads to take us in!

4 By faith and hope already there
Ev'n now the marriage-feast we share,
Ev'n now we by the Lamb are fed,
Our Lord's celestial joy we prove,
Led by the Spirit of his love,
To springs of living comfort led
Suffering and curse and death are o'er,
And pain afflicts the soul no more
While harboured in the Saviour's breast,
He quiets all our plaints and cries,
And wipes the sorrow from our eyes,
And lulls us in his arms to rest!