Prayer Book Development
Sermon Series: "Episcopal Worship and More; Why do we do what we do?"
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
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It's no surprise to anyone that I'm much more a Mary than a Martha. My daughters will tell you that my going back to school or taking classes is matter of when, not if. Which brings us to my doctoral thesis about the development of the Prayer Book[1] - and today's topic in our sermon series about being Episcopalian, and why we do what we do. Because we are a people of Common Prayer, the development of our prayer tradition matters.

With our standard apology to historians in our midst - let's jump back to the death of Henry the 8th. His son, Edward, attempts to move England into Protestantism. Directed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, Edward's largest contribution to our Anglican tradition is the Act of Uniformity of 1549, in which he institutes one book of worship to be used uniformly across the realm.

All Anglican Prayer books trace their four-fold guiding principles to this act. Anglican liturgy is: 1) grounded upon Holy Scripture, 2) agreeable to the practice of the Ancient Church, 3) unifying to the realm, and 4) designed for the edification of the people.[2] This fourth principle is primarily about people being able to hear and understand the Holy Scriptures and liturgy in their own language, so they can participate fully.

The Book of Common Prayer 1549 establishes one liturgy for the realm, and attempts to placate both Catholics and Protestants. But Cramner follows up with a second prayer book in 1552, which is extremely Protestant. For example, in the Prayer Book of 1552 the Eucharist is now understood, and specifically presented as the eating of bread and drinking of wine with thanksgiving in remembrance of Christ’s death. Definitely only a Protestant Memorial Meal.[3]

If Edward VI had lived a long life, and this had been the prayer book of the realm for any length of time, we might look like any other Reformed Protestant church. But the use of the 1552 Prayer book ends with Edward’s death in 1553. His sister Mary propels the country back into Roman Catholicism. Upon Mary's death, Elizabeth, the last of Henry's children, takes the throne in 1558.

The country braces for more violence and change, but Elizabeth and her council are careful in their approach. They choose to revert to something familiar to the people, revising the 1552 Prayer Book, rather than implementing radical reforms. Cranmer’s 1552 Prayer Book is modified slightly and becomes the 1559 Book of Common Prayer. The changes are small, but significant.

Arguably, the most important change is to the words spoken when the priest administers the bread and wine. Shrewdly, Elizabeth's prayer book includes the text from **both** of the preceding

prayers books. For example: now the words of administration for the bread include: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." A Catholic perspective, from the 1549 prayer book. And the priest continues, with the words, "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.” A Protestant perspective, from the 1552 prayer book.

By including both phrases, this new prayer book creates room for both Catholic and Protestant eucharistic theologies to live side by side within the same Church, and for Catholics and Protestants to commune side by side at the same rail.[4]

Elizabeth makes these changes for political reasons - to calm the constant conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and provide stability in the realm. Yet in the process, the Elizabethan Prayer Book establishes the core of Anglicanism: a single common text in the language of the people, with a wide middle way between Catholic and Protestant, allowing pastoral sensitivity at the local level. By allowing for a range of interpretations within one common liturgy, the Church of England under Elizabeth establishes unity in liturgy without enforcing uniformity in doctrine.

The Elizabethan Settlement and Prayer Book are in place for nearly a hundred years. What we have by the time of the end of Elizabeth’s reign is a long, formative history of worship under one prayer book, and the primary theology is that of worship, as interpreted by local worshiping communities.

Which means Anglican theology is essentially understood as it is expressed in the liturgy of a people in community. There's no absolute doctrine we must agree to, nor are we required to have a moment of personal conversion to be 'in'. To be Anglican is to pray common prayers in community. We may not always understand one another, and we certainly may not always agree, but we are Anglican because we worship together in the wide middle way created for us by the common prayer of our prayer books. We are defined through our participation in Anglican liturgy.

Now that we've established our Anglican roots and identity - let's jump ahead to the Anglican Prayer book in the United States. The first American Prayer is established in 1789, after a process of trial liturgies. Liturgy is no longer handed down a monarch, it's approved by General Convention, as we discussed when we talked about governance. It's tested by the people, through trial liturgies, which become a primary tool for our revision process in The Episcopal Church.

Also tied to an earlier conversation - about consecration of bishops for the United States, the Eucharistic theology of American Prayer books leans heavily on the Scottish Eucharistic prayers that Bishop Samuel Seabury agreed to use when he was consecrated by the Scottish Bishops.

Quick timeline: The 1789 Prayerbook of the Protestant Episcopal Church is followed by the 1892 Prayer Book, then the 1928 Prayer Book, and lastly - the 1979 Prayer Book. This revision is a

major shift. The 1979 Prayer Book centers our worship around the two primary sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Because how we pray shapes our faith and our identity, it forms how we see ourselves and the world.

The revision process included several trial liturgies, over the course of several years, (and, it takes two successive General Conventions to approve a new prayer book). Yet the implementation of the 1979 Prayer Book upset the apple cart so much that it nearly tore the church apart. Which is why, while we are due another prayer book revision, we are extremely reluctant to do anything about it.

And yet, the world has changed dramatically since 1979, and our church has as well. For it to continue to support, guide, and nurture us, our liturgy must be able to address the needs and concerns of our 21st century lives.

So, where does that leave us? Very briefly, here's where we are now in the process:

In 2015, General Convention approved resolution D050 Authorizing "An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist" as a Principal Service, with Bishop's approval. "An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist," is what we loosely call "Rite Three," and is included in the Prayer Book to allow communities to create Eucharistic liturgy for specific occasions. The resolution focused on the rubric, or rule for use of this rite, which says: "An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist", "is not intended for use at the principal Sunday service." The resolution pointed out that "not intended" isn't canonically enforceable language. Therefore, the Prayer Book doesn't forbid its use at a Principal service. A technical, but important loophole, that allows liturgical change to happen at the parish level, within the guidelines of the 1979 Prayer Book.

In 2018 General Convention created a Task Force for Liturgy & Prayer Book Revision to propose a path forward. Because I was one of the two deputies who wrote that original resolution, I was appointed Vice-Chair of the Task Force. True to our roots, the group was comprised of liturgical experts from across the Episcopal Church, and some of us with on the ground experience in liturgy creation - a vast array of differing perspectives around the table!

When General Convention gave us our mandate, it also "memorialized" the 1979 Book of Common Prayer - meaning that prayer book won't be taken away by force, it will always be appropriate to use those prayers. Our Task Force created pathways to test, review, and approve liturgy for our use. Given that one of our core Anglican principles is having liturgy be accessible to the people - we implemented mechanisms to allow faith communities to submit the liturgies they have crafted and prayed. Which has decentralized the process of creating authorized worship for our Church. What had been the arena of mostly white, male liturgical scholars, is now open wide to include the voices, values, and wisdom of perspectives and communities otherwise marginalized. Expanding our worship to include the wisdom: of Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Latino communities; and to include women, and queer, and trans voices. Because the Church has so much to learn from how God speaks in and through the variety of human experience.

Which brings us to St. Stephen's. This community has long been open to using both traditional and more expansive liturgies. We are part of this process of liturgical trial and error. Over the course of a year, our liturgies include resources from the Episcopal Church, and texts from the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada, and occasionally others.

The liturgy we are using this season is the most home-grown we have, and includes a Eucharistic prayer that was written in-house, if you will, at my last parish, with the support of my Bishop. Because trial liturgy should be the work of the people praying in community (and not crafted by liturgy professors in their studies). At the back of our worship booklet, you'll note the scriptures being drawn upon, and the resources.

I recognize that there's sometimes a question about what it means to pray Common Prayer, if we aren't all praying the exact same words across the Church. The 1979 Prayer Book offers two forms of the Eucharist in Rite One, four forms in Rite Two, and two more in An Order for Celebrating the Eucharist. And that's before the additional the offerings from Enriching Our Worship, and the other languages of the communities of The Episcopal Church.

Common Worship doesn't mean we have to say the exact same words as other Episcopalians on any given Sunday. It means praying texts framed by our tradition, and praying them together in our local parish community. Being people of common prayer, gathered around the Table.

Whether we are using a traditional or a more expansive liturgy, our worship is Anglican to its core: grounded upon Holy Scripture, agreeable to the practice of the Ancient Church, unifying to the realm, and designed for the edification of the people.

I'm incredibly grateful to you, for your willingness to be part of our historic tradition of prayer book revision and creation, as we pray together and live into being Anglicans in the 21st century. It is good to be part of this work together.

[1] Nina Ranadive Pooley, *Responsive Rather than Emergent: Intentional Episcopal Liturgy for the 21st Century*; Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of the University of the South in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry; May 2014; Sewanee, Tennessee; http://hdl.handle.net/11005/2369; PooleyResponsiveSOT2014.pdf (1.55 MB)

[2] J. Neil Alexander, "Embrace the Happy Occasion: Prayer Book Revision in Light of Yesterday's Principles, Today's Questions, and Tomorrow's Possibilities," in *Leaps and Bounds: The Prayer Book in the 21st Century*, Paul V. Marshall and Lesley A. Northup, editors, (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1997), 187.

[3] Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies,* 273.

[4] Bradshaw and Johnson comment that these two changes (the elimination of the Black Rubric and the combined words of administration) serve to make the doctrine less narrow (277). Though Kavanagh might argue that what really happened is the liturgy was widened, which in turn allowed the doctrine to widen.