

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

5th August 2020

Do you ever wonder where some of the prayers which we use week by week have come from? Or perhaps even what they might mean? We can become so familiar with the words which we use that, even if we treasure them, we may not often reflect on them.

For many of us our Prayer of Preparation - or to use its traditional name, the Collect for Purity - which we use at the start of the service of Holy Communion may be such a prayer. Possibly it is ingrained in some of your hearts but here it is again as it is not always easy to remember things out of their normal context:

Almighty God,
unto whom all hearts be open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hid:
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love thee,
and worthily magnify thy holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is much older than the Book of Common Prayer but its origins are uncertain. Among its various attributions it has been suggested that it was written for the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD to remind him not to get ideas above his station! It is certainly in circulation in Europe by the 11th century and appears in the Sarum Rite which evolved in England around this time. To begin with, it formed part of the prayers of preparation said privately by the priest but Thomas Cranmer included it in the 1549 Prayer Book. It has appeared in all subsequent prayer books including Common Worship (albeit in a slightly modernised but still very recognisable form) and today we say it together as a prayer of preparation for us all.

It follows the usual structure for a Collect: an address to God, often describing one of his attributes; a particular request; and a conclusion. In this particular Collect there is a huge amount going on in the opening section. It acknowledges immediately the greatness and power of God before talking about our relationship with him. Most of us have a few dark corners which we try to keep hidden from other people and indeed ourselves; corners where we perhaps push the things we don't particularly like about ourselves. Perhaps we hope God won't notice them either. This prayer reminds us that we can't hide anything from God - either our thoughts or our longings, positive or negative. So we may as well stop trying to hide them but, much more importantly, once they are out in the open, once we admit them, then we allow God to begin the process of redeeming and healing them. If we try to hide things and keep them secret then we are stopping ourselves from being forgiven. If we try to lie to God, it messes the healing process up. It would be bit like going to the doctor and only telling him half the symptoms because we are embarrassed by the rest.

It is healing that we ask for in the second section of the prayer - the cleansing of the thoughts of our hearts. Through being open and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, we allow God's cleansing power to flow through us washing away our fears and misconceptions. The inspiration, the breath, of the Holy Spirit can blow away the cobwebs and do some spring cleaning in our hearts.

And finally the outcome of this cleansing. As we become more open to God's cleansing and healing presence, we become more open to and aware his love and so grow in our love for him. Our love can never, in this life, be perfect, but the desire that it should be can remain. Our love and our sense of God's love for us leads us more deeply into praise and worship.

I think there is a strong sense of movement in this Collect. One thing leads to another. If we say it with sincerity and commitment, it seems to me that we are doing so in the expectation of and desire for change. I find that too the actual words of the Collect trigger memories of Scripture and other parts of the liturgy, or of different prayers and phrases, and making those connections opens up new ways of understanding. For example, and perhaps as starting point for your own explorations, Psalms 51 and 139 come to mind as do the responses from Morning and Evening Prayer. This Collect is a powerful and life-giving prayer. Don't keep it just for Sundays!

With my love and prayers

Camilla

*If you would like to discuss anything in this or any other of our mailings do get in touch.
(camillawhite@waitrose.com or 01483 892645)*

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