

Biblical Riches in Communion

A bible study on the Liturgy

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Why I wrote this study – One of my home groups asked me for a bible study on the liturgy and I couldn't find one. My local Christian bookshops said there was nothing, both in Dubai and in Norwich, and said I should write one. Canon Jeremy Haselock, a leading liturgist of the Church of England in my local cathedral in Norwich, who I called to ask about it, said that writers of liturgy tend to look at other liturgies and liturgy commentaries, while writers of bible studies tend to look only at the bible and bible commentaries, and that I should write one. Then, Revd. Canon Andrew Thompson MBE bless him, told me to write him an outline and first chapter by the end of the month. He looked at me, the way he does, and I had to do it. I just kept going, and without his encouragement and that of the Bible Study group who originally asked for it I would never have finished it and although it's not quite what I expected, I'm glad I've done it.

All bible quotes are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

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Foreword

By....?

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Church is weird.

Where else in modern life do you go to stand in rows with a load of other weird people, all turned with faces up to a screen singing songs which have few parallels in style or substance in what is misleadingly called ‘secular life’, led by a guy wearing clothes from not only another century but another country (unless you are reading this in Italy or Greece)? After a bit of this we have extracts of a translation of a 2000 year old book from yet another foreign country read to us followed by a lecture, then we stand to recite some statements of belief, and then we pray to God together, asking for things – this part is not weird for all that atheists would have you believe it, only we then often follow it with queuing up to get tiny circle of white ‘bread’ (though it is unrecognisable as ‘bread’ in any bakery I know), followed by everyone taking a sip of diluted wine from ONE CUP! We repeat this, like a fitness class, at least once a week, seemingly using the SAME WORDS week in week out from a written order which must surely, in repetitiveness, be dull. How could I invite you, a ‘normal’ person, to such an event and not be embarrassed at the oddity of it all?!

I hope to show in this book that all the above is reasonable behaviour, even desirable. I hope to show a way you could find such meaning in it that you are strengthened and supported by it.

Of course I am not talking about any church – I’m talking about the church I know best – my own. There are alternatives within my church denomination – my church has projectors and screens but most will have hymn books. But is there a parallel to rows of people singing with heads down in hymnbooks in secular life? There are churches of course without the robes I wear – some protestant ministers might wear a Victorian frock-coat on posh occasions, or a Geneva gown (like an academic gown) and tabs (two white bits where a tie would go). Or there’s the ‘Independent’ or similar modern church where the minister wears a suit and tie thinking this is up to date and normal (but consider how often you see a suit and tie these days around here). For me, I like the ancient robes – they feel more elegant and important, and help me feel a little dignity for the occasion. And I like the colour, changing as the seasons change from Advent through to Trinity. The logical alternative is the properly modern guy who is so conditioned by modern secular culture of disrespect for your elders (politicians, teachers, and any other leaders we slag off in the media because, well, it’s what you do isn’t it?) that he dresses in open shirt and jeans becoming so informal that he forgets that for important occasions modern secular people actually LIKE a bit of formality, and I’m not just talking about coronations, mayoral processions and suchlike. Such a modern pastor might well wear a suit for a wedding, a funeral, a graduation, and often his own work place, but for the worship of the Most High God, open shirt and jeans are cool. Ouch! I feel the whack of my shepherd’s rod teaching me here as I think on my own attitude, his staff lifting

me to be more respectful of God in worship. Teaching myself is part of the reason to come to church and do all that is in the liturgy. It *is* like a fitness class!

Prayer to God is the bit that is not weird – most people also understand that it's good to pray together with others – it's part of why people are so touched when the minister prays in their homes after bereavement, a time when people are touching deep reality and are ready to welcome someone who seems at home with it. It's why they come to church so often for funerals and when the soul needs healing. I talk about prayers more specifically in chapter 7 though it is in the background of all the chapters really.

So what of the bread and wine? Most churches have two sorts of services – one where we gather to sing in rows, pray, and have a lecture, and other services where we do those three, but the lecture is shorter and we make time for a coin sized piece of bread and a sip of wine – we call this 'having Communion' (see chapter 9 for the focus for that). My church alternates this pattern at our main service week by week, and has another service at another time where we have Holy Communion every week. I will describe where it comes from in the next chapter, but believe it or not, we think that we are sharing a MEAL! You may well laugh, but it's actually serious.

And as to repeating all this week by week, forced by written instruction to recite the same words, well, I talk a little of that in chapter 3.

I consider myself to be a normal 20th/21st century person who is not stuck in the past, who seeks to make his church 'relevant' to the modern world, and yet, who is completely at home with the kind of behaviour outlined in the first paragraph, even recommending it as an appropriate way for the modern person to express Godward thoughts and actions, once every week at the least, with their friends and neighbours.

I must be weird to be so at home in it.

Except that I don't think I am, and I want to explain in this book some of what goes through my head and my heart as I do these things, with reference to the bible in particular as the major document referred to in the ritual. There are riches to be mined in a church service using the tool of the bible – riches of biblical allusions throughout, which when you see them, can colour your approach to particular parts of it. Although in the writing above I interpret for you that eating a bit of bread and a sip of wine is called 'having Communion' I am not writing this book for the complete outsider who would have no idea what the phrase 'having Communion' would refer to but trying to show how strange we are to think such an unobvious title is so normal and how the actions we do seem to have no parallel with what people normally do in other formal situations. However, if you are a complete outsider, I hope you enjoy the book too, and will be so enticed as to come and enter in to such an experience. Church services are not to be 'gone to' like the movies, a passive experience of receiving what the screen presents (though perhaps you enter into them and cry at the emotional parts surreptitiously like I do). For church services to have any meaning or value

they must be entered into – at the very least you should try to mean the words you are given to say. If you do not believe, then ask God to help you believe for that one hour that you may understand what your Christian friends are doing (it will feel like you are talking the four walls but never mind that). After having read this book, if you can enter into the words as you say or sing them, and also keep the references in mind as the service progresses, you will be caught up to heaven.

If you are my more expected audience and are not caught up to heaven when you come to worship, isn't that a bit sad? It may not be the service leader, it may not be the choice of hymns/songs, it may not be the sermon, or the way the prayers were said...it may be that you forgot that you have the key to life. There are riches of biblical allusion in the Communion service which you could discover and use to enrich your time in church. Take the key, and open the door.

For discussion

I say that many things in the first paragraph have no parallel in secular life – this is not quite true. What parallels can you think of to things that happen in church? Where do they happen and what are the differences between them and the church way of doing it?

Chapter 2 – Passover

The service of Holy Communion goes by a number of names, mostly based on different references in the bible: Communion (1 Corinthians 10.16^a), The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.20^b), and The Breaking of Bread (Acts 2.42^c – which may be a different version of the meal). 'Eucharist' is used from the 2nd century and means Thanksgiving (in Greek), referring to the central prayer and the character of the celebration. All these titles refer back to the meal known as the Passover in the Old Testament.

At the time of the events which set off the Passover tradition, God had been sending plagues on Egypt in an effort to persuade the Pharaoh to let the enslaved Israelites leave the country. After several failed attempts God says he is going to have to go for the final ultimatum, to kill the first born of every family resident there, but in order that the Israelites may be spared that fate he warns them to stay inside, slaughter a lamb, and use its blood to mark the doorways and windows of the house, and then the destroying angel will know to leave that house in peace. The calamity of the death of the firstborn will come overnight, and the reaction to it will be so swift that there will be no time before they are expelled from the country even to allow bread to rise before cooking so they are to leave with whatever unleavened bread they have prepared! They will cross the Red Sea and the River Jordan and escape their slavery for good if they do as God directs. As a way of calling to mind that great rescue from slavery they are to slaughter a lamb annually and use unleavened bread in a feast of Passover, remembering the day when the destroying angel 'passed over' their ancestors houses to deliver them, first from death, and then from slavery. If you want to read about this in more detail then the first half of the book of Exodus is the main place – this event was so important that it became a major motif in the bible for God's involvement with his people – God is a God who rescues from death and slavery and brings us into freedom.

I find it amazing, considering the reputation of the church for harping on about sin, that the most frequent service or sacrament it celebrates is based on a ritual that talks very little about sin and majors instead on deliverance. Evangelicals especially love the 'Repent and be saved!' slogan and you can't help feeling we relish the 'Repent' part so much that we'd be flummoxed by a God who, on the Passover night seems more concerned that people should rush and be saved, telling them not to wait even for their bread to rise but to stand and be delivered! (God, a highwayman with a difference!) Led by an impulsive reformed murderer (who became the most humble man on earth), ALL of them were to be saved. There's not much about repentance, but everything about being in the right camp.

^a The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? (Sharing translates 'Communion' or Greek 'koinonia')

^b When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper.

^c They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Not that the church is wrong about repentance – the other main sacrament we celebrate, also modelled on a part of the same deliverance story, proclaims a baptism of repentance for those who would reach the other side of the Red Sea/Jordan/deep river of death safely. Confession and repentance come into the Communion service as it does in nearly all Anglican services – I come to that in chapter four – but the Passover is more about deliverance and the blood which delivers is not shed for sin but for a sign. Of course expectations of right living are not far behind – the Easter Anthems (an ancient song of the church) talk of that as the consequence of having a Passover sacrificed for us:

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: so let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5.7b, 8) Christ once raised from the dead dies no more: death has no more dominion over him. In dying he died to sin once for all: in living he lives to God. See yourselves therefore as dead to sin: and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6.9-11)^a

Holy Communion then is a celebration of the deliverance of God in as much as it remembers again the last proper meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples – that meal was a Passover meal with his friends. Thoughts of the service of Holy Communion being like the Passover meal are very dominant in my thinking about the whole experience but there are some difficulties I have had with this. In a Passover the unleavened bread is a reminder to the Jew of the rush with which they had to leave the house that fateful night – if our meal is a Passover then it is logical we would share some unleavened bread, which we do (for those who come from churches with wafers, it's not rice paper but unleavened bread, albeit of a particular variety). But then come thoughts of a lamb being slaughtered and its blood being used to declare to the powers of destruction: You have no place here! In the Passover meal the meat of the animal is then roasted and shared to all those who are sheltering behind the protection of that bloody sign. This is all wonderful imagery for what the death of Christ means for us but if the Communion is a straight development of the Passover then I wonder why we don't share out some roast lamb rather than some wine because although it is the blood of the lamb which made the sign which saves, as far as the meal is concerned it was the meat which was shared out among the family.

I wondered if perhaps in the beginning it was this way and they did share the meat at the early celebrations of what would become Holy Communion. A Passover meal is more than just a ritual pared down to its symbols – it is an actual meal – there is roast lamb with all the accompaniments, and the family gathered round for a whole evening together of eating and drinking and remembrance about the old days about how God saved us. Our one hour Communion service bears almost no resemblance to it in terms of that kind of feel, but in

^a This translation from Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, ©The Archbishops' Council 2000.

the beginning it seems to me that the early Christians DID think of it as a meal though some were condemned by St. Paul for the way they did it – Paul hears rumours that when they came together as a church there were divisions among them, so much so that he tells them it is no longer the Lord’s supper they eat (1 Corinthians 11.17^a onwards).

The thing which makes their version of the supper no longer the Lord’s Supper is that some go ahead with their own meal while others remain hungry, and others get drunk! Each group brings their own food, but one of the features of a Passover is that everyone shares the meal and that the poor team up with others so everyone has enough (Exodus 12.4^b) and this is what was missing – those who had nothing were humiliated when they came to church and their meetings in this respect did more harm than good – it was therefore no longer a meal which declared freedom, no longer a Passover. It was at the heart of early church living and teaching that the poor be looked after (Acts 6.1^c) and their snubbing of the poor during a fellowship meal was an insult to God.

Paul reminds them that they have homes to eat and drink in – so although they were taking up the logic of Passover and having an actual meal together, the communal meal in Paul’s eyes was not simply to satisfy hunger – the gentile church in Corinth had some things to learn about ritual meals from a Jewish background. The church’s concern for the poor was reflected in communal meals for a long time, often called agape meals (sometimes translated love feasts but that to me has connotations that don’t belong), but as the religion of Christianity became more acceptable and eventually was legalised in the 4th century, so church gatherings became more formal – and towards the end of the century the Council of Laodicea banned ‘so-called Agapes on Sundays or in the church and eating in the house of God’ (canon 28). But still, even in Paul’s rebuke to the Corinthians it is clear that Jesus didn’t take the lamb, but the bread and the cup. Perhaps there were other customs around at the time which involved bread and wine.

While I’m on this I’ll say also that I find it hard to accept that the early Jewish converts could say to themselves that because they interpreted Jesus death using the symbolism of the Passover, they would then celebrate a Passover meal every week rather than simply remember him every annual Passover. In my mind it would be like saying, after a particularly

^a 17 Now in the following instructions I do not command you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ... ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. ²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

^b If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.

^c Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. (and they then went on to sort it out with the help of St. Stephen)

meaningful Christmas that I think I will celebrate Christmas every week. I just wouldn't do that – I'd remember the new meaning of Christmas that this year's special one has given me, but every Christmas. But if I follow this logic then the weekly service is not perhaps based on Passover at all. Hmm. There is an answer.

It seems that the Jews at the time did have other ritual customs, one of which was the custom of a Kiddush where there were prayers over the food and drink – this might be on the eve of religious feasts, including the weekly Sabbath, or simply at special gatherings of people for other events. In this custom, the sharing of the food and wine declared a sense of being in good fellowship with those who share it which is important (this is part of our feeling about Communion – although the context is different, Matthew 5 expresses the feeling: 'So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift'.) Some have pointed out also that the 'bread' Jesus shares is artos (i.e. ordinary bread) not matzoth (unleavened bread) and surmise that Jesus' last supper wasn't a Passover at all but more of a Kiddush type meal. As to the latter thought, it says he told them to go and prepare a Passover – I think he would have noticed if they'd done it wrong.

It seems to me that Jesus was using the custom of a more frequently celebrated religious meal and infusing it with meaning from at least one other reference, the Passover which he was celebrating with his disciples. Just as the Passover lamb was shed not for sin but for a sign, the distribution and sharing of the meal was a sign of who is IN and who is OUT as regards being part of God's people or not. The extraordinary references to 'eating his flesh' and 'drinking his blood' are an intense way of saying that we very closely share in fellowship with him if we partake of this meal. [This is an idea associated with a sacrifice too – they slaughter an animal but in some way we identify with the animal, that is to say, there is something of the death of the animal substituting for us who are sentenced to die – we closely associate with the animal dying (1 Corinthians 10.16-18^a).]

In the Passover story God's angel is outside destroying but the blood/sacrifice serves as a sign to protect you. In the Passover story God is not said to be especially present at the house in which a Passover is celebrated in the way we often imply his presence when we refer to Holy Communion being a sacrament^b but part of the evening involved partaking of the slain victim who provides the protection and this gives a very neat image of our sharing in what Christ does for us on the cross – we share in or are identified with his death and

^a The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?

^b Book of Common Prayer 1662: an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof

resurrection in some way (1 Corinthians 10.16^a). In a Passover the children will question the head of the household as to what they are doing and he will reply ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’ (Exodus 13.8), even though he personally may never have literally been to Egypt in his life – the presider in that context puts himself and all who partake of the meal so closely in identification with those who actually came out of Egypt that they can speak of it as if they themselves were there. In the same way, when we celebrate Communion we put ourselves with Christ as he breaks the bread and takes the cup, close by, really with him, and he with us. We then think of God being especially present with us as we share in the meal, identifying ourselves with the death of Christ as symbolised in the meal. With such intense intimacy we identify ourselves as being rescued from slavery (to sin), now pilgrims on his journey to cross the Red Sea and the Jordan (death), and headed for a ‘promised land’ (resurrection).

So as you come to the meal, remember that image of the celebration of deliverance from slavery, but a slavery more insidious than that of Israel under Egypt, a slavery to sin. If you are not sure if you are IN or OUT, then I’d encourage you to be IN first and follow the consequences later. Many of those who did escape would later prove themselves false to God and died but God still delivered them from slavery. You may be agnostic at the moment but I’d recommend joining up with the travelling company headed home. One church member told me before she was baptised that she wasn’t sure if she could really go along with everything affirmed in the Nicene and Apostles Creeds yet, but that she wanted to follow Christ: she wanted to be counted among that number of the saints as they marched in. The creeds are there to tell what the official doctrine is of the church and some of it is hard to take on board right at the beginning, but the most basic step is to acknowledge Jesus as Lord – he is the one we will now obey and although we do not understand everything at the beginning we will believe he will lead us into all truth as we follow him. By turning to Christ, joining his company, and sharing in a meal with him and his present day disciples, you are you placing yourself behind the blood, inside a safe house, where the angel of death will not destroy. Personal understandings of more complicated church doctrines can come after you have put your trust in the God they proclaim.

In my introduction I said that teaching myself is part of the reason to come to church and do all that is in the liturgy. The origins of the service in its Passover setting are very much to do with teaching – a meal set up in such a way as to teach children the lessons of the past about God, reminding adults of the ways of God in the past with a view of instilling trust in him in the present. At the institution of the meal it was designed as an annual event to remember when the nation of Israel was delivered from slavery. (Psalm 78.1-8 gives a good idea of the rationale.^b) Praise was integral to the experience of course; it wasn’t just an

^a The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

^b 1 Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

Note continued on next page

objective history lesson but a celebration of God's great achievement in the rescue, and God's presence with his people. The songs and familiar words, whether I emotionally feel them or not, is to both express what's in my heart, and to teach my heart and mind what it should feel and know about God. I stand to honour God, I sing up to praise him, I kneel to humble myself before him, my bodily posture together with the words directs my distracted mind as to a right attitude, and hopefully moulds it into feeling it.

A Passover takes place in a home normally, and in a desire to make people feel at home we try to make our services more like surrounding life, using modern native tongue (in our case English), using modern musical forms (hymns and songs), using modern media (pew sheets and PowerPoint), and some modern materials and designs for the ancient robes, but although we want people to 'feel at home' in church, it is not in the sense that I put my feet up and sit back after a hard day's work. There is an assumption of participation, not just looking in from the outside but of identifying with the story told in the meal as OUR story. It tells of something of the past – a reminder of the heritage of the saints who walked before us – and brings us into a fellowship of those both from the past and in the present eating it today.

At the end of the day, the recounting of the events of the past reminds us of the greatness of God, and that he is on our side, with us. This is not in a simplistic way that God is there to take away our own responsibility in decision making, or sets down a map as detailed as a GPS guide and we simply follow the path worked out for us (and if we go wrong he will adjust the directions automatically). It is a reminder that God has done some really awesome things in the past, on a level with Hurricane Haiyan or whatever – awesome things to rescue his people. In a world obsessed with information, increasingly aware that verbal or textual information does not communicate sometimes so readily as visual media, the communion service may be a more visual and sense oriented way of communicating God's story than a bored critic of 'churchgoing' would give it credit for. Its method of prayer, moving from symbol to symbol, expressing some truths without words, tells a story. In the next few chapters I will talk of some of the symbols in the ritual and try to show how knowing the bible can deepen our appreciation of what is spoken by them, but for now, the Biblical story of the Passover teaches us of a God who rescues from the chains of slavery,

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,
3 things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.

4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

5 He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;

6 that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children,

7 so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;

8 and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

and Christ, the Passover we celebrate, gives us a new angle on this old story – he gives us an event to remember which is the most awesome thing this planet has ever seen. We still have to go through death's deep waters, but each time we 'have communion' we remember an event in the past that broke the strongest chain of slavery that this world knows.

For discussion

1. Read Exodus 12.1-42 and Matthew 26.17-30. Both meals are eaten in the context of an oppressive foreign government, by people looking for freedom. The rescue of the first group becomes an interpretation for the second. Does this rescue story resonate with you at all?
2. In a world of increasingly visual information in the media, what do you think is taught by the way the Communion service is conducted in your church? If we returned to it being, or imagined it being a proper Passover meal what more would we learn through it?

Chapter 3 - Arrivals and greetings

The first thing that happens in a Communion service is that the people gather and greet each other. Sometimes in a big church building with a small congregation it can seem that everyone wants to sit three feet away from any neighbour in an effort to meet God individually. This makes it hard to sing an opening piece of music (which has been a standard while the ministers enter since at least the 5th century) and I hope it doesn't happen in your church. It gives an impression that no one wants, really, to be or communicate with anyone else. This is a shame since the word 'liturgy' (an amalgamation of two Greek words, 'people' and 'work') implies it's a corporate event and anyway, later in the service we will claim to be 'one body'.

In church we first gather, and then greet each other – the president says, The Lord be with you, and we all reply, and also with you. It sounds a bit like the Star Wars farewell, May the force be with you, and also with you, only the minister doesn't not say, May the Lord be with you because, although he may wish that the Lord be with you, it comes with a little more force than that. Another version of the words is: The Lord is here, his Spirit is with us. He is implying, The Lord is with you, and the people are also responding, and he is also with you. This greeting, in use in this form since the 3rd or possibly 1st century, has no verb 'to be' in the original but in English you have to choose which version to use as we don't like to say, 'The Lord with you' - it needs a verb in the middle and whether you choose 'be' or 'is' makes a difference. We have all responded to such a statement with, And also with you, since the 4th century. [When I give these dates I refer to the dates of early written liturgies – we do not know how long these phrases were in use before the texts we now possess were written down.] The president doesn't greet people this way to sound churchy but because in using words in such long use we identify ourselves as in fellowship with Christians from these early times who walked before us. They're good words too. I hope you always come to church in such a state that you know the Lord IS with you, but if you don't, certainly the president wishes it, and the next chapter [Confession] will take care of anything in the way of it.

The use of the word President is significant. It does not refer to His Excellency the President of a country of course, but to the one who presides at table. Although in many churches there will be greetings from other ministers up front, perhaps some notices and a welcome from a churchwarden or something, the rubrics (the red words in the book which give the rules for ordering the service) say it's the presider, the president who says this greeting, and it's when the president says it that we are properly under way. Why is that? Why can't ANYONE say welcome – perhaps the church warden would do it better? Think Passover and you have the answer – it's a meal in someone's house remember? When you visit someone for a meal, you may be greeted by others on your way in, but you don't feel you've properly got there until the hosts themselves have greeted you. The president is playing the part of

the host for this meal – if you want, you can think of him as playing the part of Jesus at a recalling of his last supper – I cannot call it a re-enactment exactly.

Already we are saying something significant and we've only got as far as the greeting. We use an ancient formula (albeit alongside a modern, Hi there! if you've got a trendy church warden introducing the first hymn as the minister enters) which acknowledges our continuity in history with the people of God since the early centuries. We think of ourselves as in someone's house, greeted by a head of a table, a table round which we all expect to share, in a fellowship (the Lord is here, his Spirit is with us – this version of those words shows that fellowship or sharing in the Spirit more explicitly). In these little things, much context is set.

I want to talk a little about the issue that some people have with repeating the same words week by week. There are advantages of course – think of how difficult it would be to sing Happy Birthday if we didn't all know the same words and same tune. Have you ever been at someone's birthday party when they struck up with Happy Birthday and you thought, O God no! not that one again, it's so BORING! And that tune – why don't they jazz it up a bit?! I doubt it. Pondering why might give you the answer as to how people can say a liturgy so many times without getting bored – they are thinking of the person the words are focused on, and entering into the joy of the occasion, or trying to. If every time we sang Happy Birthday we droned it out unenthusiastically, looking at the time, feeling forced to sing it, then fairly soon we'd feel bored with it. Our attitude makes a difference. We don't find singing Happy Birthday boring because we enter into the spirit of the occasion, and when a sulky sibling doesn't want to join in because his birthday girl sister has all the attention, we chivvy them up and try to use the song to teach them how they ought to be feeling. Remember how I said the Passover was instituted to teach? We say and sing the words we have partly because we feel them, and partly because, on an off day full of flu and depression, we are to teach ourselves by them. And as I've said, repeating words makes it possible for the community to join in, even when the projector breaks or the pew sheet printer dies. The Lord be with you...

If you didn't answer that you really need to learn something!

Gathering, greeting, and repetition are all biblical expectations of a godly community. I've put some bible verses to think about in the questions at the end.

But now, look at the lovely prayer that comes next. The scene is set as a meal in someone's house, a family gathering or a fellowship greeted as those who are with the Lord, and the order of service, the people's work (the liturgy) is there to express our feelings and character, but also to form our character and guide our feelings. It is a work: in Luke 1, Zechariah finishes his 'duty' in the temple, in Hebrews 8, Christ offers a better 'service' (both words translating 'liturgy'). It aims to be a balanced diet – We take time to think about the food we eat, and when we are ill may take special care to eat those things which will heal

us, following a chosen diet. So too, liturgy makes sure you have wholesome balance of spiritual input - it's not just 45 minutes of musical entertainment, followed by a lecture like it is in some churches. (Naughty of me to put it that way really.) The next part of the work is to ask God to help us do this work well.

In the Anglican service, the prayer that follows, from St. Gregory around 780AD, is a beautiful prayer of humility, desire, honesty and open hearted love. It is not a confession prayer although it asks for cleansing. It is the 'Collect for Purity'. To see the bible background, you can see that it reflects on a number of ideas in Psalm 51 and 139 at least. I didn't put them in the footnotes – and don't just look them up in a rush, seeking mere information, but read them both slowly and drink them in before coming back to think on the prayer I am referring to. Modern people! Neither this book, nor the liturgy, nor God, are interested primarily in imparting to you mere information. Having those two psalms in your heart before you read the prayer can enrich your praying of this prayer in church.

Collect for Purity

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

See the open honesty at the beginning – God knows EVERYTHING in you. See the acknowledgement of imperfection in the request to be cleansed, but notice that you do not see the attitude of one who fears (Hebrews 4.16^a; 10.19f^b). The desire is to love (Calvin: prayer is love on its knees), and to worthily magnify. An interesting choice of word – what does it mean to you? Why not ask to worthily praise, or worthily worship, or worthily thank? Magnify to me seems richer – it's not my actions I want to increase, but God. Do you come to church to make God's name greater or for some other reason? All churches in the country where I write have parking difficulties because of the numbers of people coming to church, needing the help of the police for festivals – think how much more Jesus' name would be noticed if ALL who call themselves Christian came to church – and that's before they've done anything inside to magnify his name!

All this is asked 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. I do wonder sometimes why we don't use, as the evangelical churches around us use, the phrase 'in Jesus name' much more. 'Through Jesus Christ our Lord' sounds rather weak in comparison and not instantly understandable and I wonder why the Anglican Church is so dominated by it. If I hear someone pray confidently, 'I pray that I may worthily magnify your holy name, in the name of Jesus' (Pentecostal emphasis there ☺) I can just hear my soul answering 'AyMEN!' with a subtly

^a Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^b ¹⁹Therefore, my friends,^[g] since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus... ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith

increased heart rate of expectation already! If I hear a calm, ‘I pray that I may worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord’, then I can hear a monotone ‘Amen’ coming on and no excitement whatsoever. But this is where you need to read your bible. Of course the verses you will remember have, ‘in Jesus name’, but there are others: Galatians 3.14 – the blessings of Abraham come through Christ Jesus; Titus 3.6 – Spirit renewal is poured on us through Jesus Christ; Romans 5.21 – eternal life through Jesus Christ; John 1.17 – grace and truth came through Jesus Christ; Romans 1.8 Paul thanks God through Jesus Christ; Hebrews 13.21 May he equip you through Jesus Christ. There’s more but that’s enough to go on with. The fact is that every blessing, every favour, every thanksgiving, every approach to God, is ‘through Jesus Christ’ because without him we are cut off from God. Without Jesus opening the way there is no access to the Father – we cannot bring our thanksgiving, our praise, our confession, or anything of ourselves – we are outside the gate. And so with the same humility of the Prayer of Humble Access, we say our prayers and do everything else for God, saying ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’, acknowledging and honouring the one who has enabled such an access to God.

I still think there is room for a bit of ‘in JEsus name!’ though, or if you want, to rush the first few words joining them all together in excitement, ‘inthenameof JEEEEsus!’. Whoah! Hold on sister! This will come in chapter 7, but for now we remain humbly desiring to perfectly love God, worthily magnifying his holy name, acknowledging that all this is only possible through Jesus Christ.

We have greeted each other saying much more than ‘hi’, and we have stated our purpose in humility. As I think of the Passover, I think of myself arriving at the door of the house of God, I have gathered with others and our host has now come and greeted us, and we are almost ready to go into the front room.

For discussion

1. In the country where I’m writing this, the standard greeting in Arabic is, Peace be on you and the standard reply is, And on you peace. This seems richer to me. Among Pentecostal Churches here they greet each other with the phrase, ‘Praise the Lord!’ and you are supposed to reply, ‘Praise the Lord!’. As you consider the difference between, Hi there, and, The Lord be with you, think about your own first attitude to others when you meet them – is there any sense in your heart as you greet them of imparting blessing to them? What greetings are used in the bible? 1Sa25.5,6; Mt 10.12,13; Lk 1.28,29

2. What is your normal attitude of mind when you enter church for Communion? Do you come expecting to join your family, in fellowship, or to assemble as another individual in a crowd? What is fellowship? Here’s some places to look: Gen 2:18; 3:8; 5:22-24; Ex 24:2; 25:8; Num 12:8; Matt 18:20; John 14:23; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16; Phil 2:1; 3:8-10; 1 John 1:3-7. There are boundaries however – those who are in and those who are not: 1 Cor 5:2; 2 Cor

6:14-18; We will come to that in chapter 8. Desire for fellowship with God is seen also in many of the psalms.

3. Thinking about Psalms 51 and 139 along with the Collect for Purity – what phrases mean the most to you? How could you encourage such an attitude to be already there when you arrive in church? (NB. I am not sure I'm referring to ALL the attitudes expressed in 139!)

Chapter 4 – Confession

As I think of the Passover, I think of myself arriving at the door of the house of God, I have gathered with others and our host has now come to the door and greeted us. It's time to take my shoes off and enter the house and to do that, I need to wash.

Outside mosques there are places to wash. You will be glad that everyone does because with your shoes in the rack outside, it would spoil the carpet inside very quickly if you all went in unwashed. Some of the Christian denominations who use our church also remove their shoes before entering (having washed before they came because our church has no facilities like their churches back home). We, who find such customs strange, must be strange to them who think that it would be insulting to God to come into his presence as equals, careless of his holiness, unclean – was not Moses bidden to remove his shoes when standing on holy ground^a? (Likewise, is there anyone of us who's conscience was so tender that as they were about to put their money in the church collection, remembering that their 'brother' had something against them, went first to make peace with their brother before completing the action of offering their life to God with a gift (Matthew 5.23ff^b)? No, we'd bung in the money and text them later. It was probably their fault anyway. We really do pick and choose when it comes to obedience!)

But there is a place for washing clean before you come in to have dealings with God. After you have arrived in a first century house it was the custom to offer a little water to wash the feet of your guests which will have been dusty from the road – no modern tarmac in those days, though in wealthy cities there were pavements. Jesus at his last supper offers to wash the disciples feet for them (John13.1-17) – the work of a servant remembered in the Maundy Thursday ritual – in order to make them presentable for lying round the low table for eating.

The disciples were basically clean – thus Jesus calms Peter down when he gets enthusiastic but still sees a need to make them acceptable for table fellowship. In our Communion service structure I see two parallels: As a parallel to the wash that they will have had back at home before walking round for the meal, I would present the expectation of any church that you will somehow prepare yourself before coming to participate and share in what you have come for. As a parallel to the washing of feet on arrival I would think of the confession of sins fairly soon after you have arrived at church, when it is in that position in the service – in most services, we give you opportunity to get rid of all obstacles between you and God by

^a Exodus 3.4,5 God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

^b 23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

having a moment to confess, together with others, the sins that separate you from him. Before the desire for the revival of Communion in the Reformation period, confession was privately done to the priest, but the reformation brought the new feature of communal confession – Archbishop Hermann encouraged this and others followed. He did this I think to discourage the elitism of the ordained priesthood and to encourage more devout religious expression.

The liturgy reminds us first of Jesus' standard to which we aspire: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' (Deut. 6.5) One 12th century Rabbi, Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (AD1140-1217), said that this 'is a call to love God with a passion far more intense than that of a couple experiencing the pleasure of intercourse after a prolonged separation'^a. Our love of God is often so lukewarm and could hardly be described as 'with all our soul, or with all our strength'. Next comes that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. (Lev. 19.18). And I can say for myself that I've a way to go on that one too. But then the liturgy, from varied heritage^b, quickly assures us that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ (John 3.16^c), to save us from our sins (1 Timothy 1.15^d), to be our advocate in heaven (1 John 2.1^e) and bring us to eternal life (John 3.16 again). We should then confess our sins (Psalm 32.5^f; 1 John 1.9^g; James 5.16^h) in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments (keeping the basic Ten would be an achievement for many!) and to live in

^a In Sefer Hasidim 12, cited by Rabbi Lawrence A Hoffman in *Shabbat at Home* (2004), in turn cited by Allen Hilton in *Feasting on the Word* (ed. Bartlett and Taylor) 2011 (a wonderful series for lectionary preachers) which is where I saw it and cite it to you! Rabbi Judah gives lots of advice including, 'don't masturbate, don't pray in bed, don't fart during prayers, but if you do, be silent until the odour subsides' as well as 'Give good advice to all men who come to you, even to your enemies' - interesting alongside Jesus call to love our enemies, though the rabbi's logic was that your enemy will not believe you so will purposely avoid following your advice, to your benefit. I digress.

^b For those interested in where things come from: The introduction to the confession prayer and the prayer itself, along with other parts in our service, is taken from or influenced by a reformation liturgy (thus the string of bible allusions) by Herman von Wied, (Archbishop of Cologne in 1543), helped by Martin Bucer and Philip Melanchthon (a friend of Martin Luther), based on a Brandenburg-Nurnburg order of 1535 compiled by Johannes Brenz and Andreas Osiander, whose niece married Thomas Cramner, who brought us the English prayer book of 1549. It is wonderful how widely people networked in the pre-electronic reformation era – these days few English theologians speak/read more than their own language but Cramner and his colleagues seem to me much more in touch with the history and writings of the past and the politics of the present and it shows in the prayer book we still use today and their sermons.

^c For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

^d The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

^e My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

^f Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

^g If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^h Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

love and peace with all (Remember some of the verses on Fellowship at the end of the last chapter?).

It can appear sometimes that the Anglican Church is obsessive about sin, having confession at almost every service. Am I really so unclean? What have I done that is so bad since last I came? Many a baptism family tries to convince me of their worthiness and upright life when I push them a little on the need to come to church. ‘You don’t need to come to church to be a Christian’ is their plea. No, but it would be a poor son who never ate with the rest of the family, a poor daughter who never came to any family celebration, and they have done just this. I push them to consider baptism as a turning point, a rite of passage to mark a transformation of their former nominal Christian faith into a more active living with God day by day, rather than to wait for the child’s wedding (or for some, the acceptance letter from the Church school). Acknowledging sin and confessing it seems, for many, a bit out dated. Our lives are not so desperately bad (I’ve not murdered anyone have I?), and we feel no need to express how wretched we feel in a confession prayer, because we don’t feel that wretched. But repentance isn’t just about sins; nor is it especially fussed about feelings, it’s to do with sin and the direction of your life. In Romans 7.8-25 it is clear that it is not just the deeds of sin which are the problem, but the force inside, the tendency we have, the sin at work within us that is the problem. Feelings or not, we need to express a repentance in deed and word and church gives us the place to do it in word, that we may go out and do it in deed.

When Jesus was baptised he was without sin, but rising up from the water the Spirit descended and God spoke – this was the inauguration of a new creation, a new beginning, and his life, now filled with the Spirit in a new way, he was turned in a new direction and was transformed – his life was not the same afterwards. This is our model, a motif for the Christian life – it is a turning, a constant change towards whatever future God has for us. Repentance is not only to do with a constant bemoaning of sin – though it is right to be remorseful of sin – but as the Passover suggests, it is also to do with a getting up to leave slavery, a leaving an old life behind, and getting on with a new life. If Jesus who had no sin, submitted himself to this baptism of repentance and was transformed, how much more should we who have sinned keep turning ourselves towards God, desiring to live out our own transformation. This is trouble for those who are too settled to change – they’d rather not be transformed – we only came to get the baby ‘done’. How much they miss, seeing the label ‘Christian’ as a badge without a job description. But I would encourage you to be a disciple – one who follows Christ, who himself found baptism a repentance in as much as his life then took on a new direction, a new commission.

So I parallel confession with the washing of feet in a first century visit to someone’s house. It is an essence of Christian faith that we are made clean in the sight of God. If we are to dine with him we must be presentable, to his standards. The turning part, the repentance, we

can do something about but we are not able to do it alone, and so it is that we turn to our host, God himself, to help us where we cannot, and say:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.

(Or the other prayer we use often: Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God – which refers to the two great commandments we have not done, and whilst it doesn't express sorrow like the first prayer, it gives more specific request for amendment of life based on Micah 6.8^a)

Sometimes this is followed by the Kyrie Eleison (The first phrase in Greek for: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy, in use here or elsewhere in our services since the 4th century at least – and in my experience all the best tunes for it are to the Greek words for some reason). This is rather mournful but the Christian faith gives us also an assurance of sins forgiven (1 John 1.9^b) which comes usually in this form: Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal, through Jesus Christ our Lord. When the priest/president says it he is declaring what God has declared so that you may hear it and take it to heart – and as you take it to heart and your faith in that forgiveness sinks in, so your new standing with God is in a real way applied (your faith has saved you, go in peace), so it can be that indeed as the words were spoken you applied it by faith and you are forgiven, you can go in peace. (Does this mean the priest brings about what he declares?) Sometimes, especially when we are low, we can know things with our brains, but somehow hearing someone say it out loud can help us apply it to our hearts. We have such extraordinary power in words to hurt and to harm, Jesus tells us we have power in our words to heal and forgive too!

There is an issue for some about forgiving someone's sins and some clergy, I think in a desire not to be seen as putting themselves on a pedestal above their lay church members, will use the 'we' instead of 'you' but I don't think that's the reason the option was given to do that.

^a He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

^b If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Others will say rhetorically, who has the right to forgive sins except God alone? (Mark 2.7^a) Sometimes people who are anti-clerical quote this as a question whose answer is self-evident (obviously only God forgives sins) but note who asks the question and the answer that Jesus gives to them. We can put it as a serious question however - who has the rights to forgive sins? And the answer is that the church does and we do: Matthew 16.18ff^b; 18.18^c; John 20.23^d.

Since the 4th century the Gloria has followed the news that we are forgiven – I will mention that a little when I get to music in chapter 6. Since the fifth century there has been a ‘Collect’, a prayer to collect our thoughts together at the conclusion of the gathering/preparation section of the service before we get on to the first bit of meat for the day, the bible readings.

For discussion

1. What different ways did people approach God in the bible and how did they prepare? (Not as easy as you might think to find verses but here's a few: Exodus 3.3-6; Joshua 6.15 (a prayer walk?); Ezra 8.21-23; Psalm 4.4-5; Daniel 6.10; 8.3) Do you prepare yourself at all for coming to church, especially thinking of a Communion service? What preparation do you think could be done before you arrive?
2. How can you avoid the car journey to church destroying any preparation of your heart you did at home?
3. I pick up from baptism families, and some marriage guidance couples, that admission of guilt and being in the wrong (as well as forgiveness) is an issue for some people. How much

^a Mark 2.5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God.

^b 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

^c Matthew 18.15 “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one... 17 ... and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

^d John 20. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

is admission of guilt a problem for you? Do you tend to feel guilty when you're not, or not guilty when you are? Why is this?

3. Do you have issues with forgiveness? Are you shy to acknowledge the power you have to forgive? Does forgiveness depend on repentance? Can your forgiveness have any effect on someone who is not repenting? Might this apply to God?

4. Sometimes the minister can use 'these or other appropriate words' but with the confession we are supposed to use one of the authorized forms only. What sort of things would be inappropriate when publicly confessing sins? (Confession of things you weren't responsible for? Speaking of God in an unbefitting way – eg making him out to be an ogre?)

Chapter 5 - Bible readings

The whole service is full of biblical allusions and quotes but having straight extracts of the Bible read when we gather together has always been part of the practice of religious communities – Jewish synagogues in the first century had non-sacrificial worship with an emphasis on reading, exposition and prayer (Luke 4.16-27^a; Acts 13.14,27^b; 15.21^c; 16.13^d). The early church followed Jewish customs and read the Old Testament but they also read letters from the early overseers (bishops) and missionaries such as Peter, James, Paul, and others. Justin Martyr says (in his First Apology c.150AD) ‘the records of the apostles or writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows’ – remember that very few would own their own copies. Over time a specific selection of these bishop’s letters and other widely circulated scrolls were taken as authoritative and accepted as bible or gospel truth – a core of writings that we regard as sound as a basis for discussing doctrine. (Those which Protestant churches accept are the main core, while other mainline churches recognise certain extra books (slightly varying by denomination but Roman and Anglican accept the same set) as ‘deuterocanonical’ books, the Apocrypha, as being useful to read but somehow different from the main canon of books.)

The tradition of having readings from other books in the main church service died out towards the 4th century and two or three readings and a psalm became the norm. Of course reading other books outside the formal church service continued – bookshops and internet today are overflowing with such materials and we will unofficially regard one or other author as ‘sound’ or not by popular vote! It has always been the custom to have appropriate songs interspersed with the readings, principally using Jesus own songbook, the Psalms. Many modern churches do not want to imitate Jesus on this front and prefer to see his songbook as a historical resource for study rather than for singing, which I think is sad. On the other hand one could ask why we have to listen to these ancient books being read in church at all? Are there not more relevant and approachable materials to hand?

The Old Testament seems so geared to one ancient nation alone that it often feels as strange to us as Gabriel Betteredge reading Robinson Crusoe for guidance (Wilkie Collins – The Moonstone). Gabriel says, ‘I have tried that book for years – generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco – and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad – Robinson Crusoe. When I want advice – Robinson Crusoe. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much – Robinson Crusoe. I have worn out six stout

^a 16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... 20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them...(and then followed a lively debate and attempted assassination).

^b And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down 15 After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it.” 16 So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak:... 27 ... the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath...

^c For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.

^d On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

Robinson Crusoe with hard work in my service. On my lady's birthday she gave me a seventh.' Perhaps the bible would be good to read when spirits are bad, when we want advice, or our wives plague us, or it may be such a strange book that it would take a drop too much to persuade us to read it.

We hardly ever read the old writings of our own nations, or the writings of countries where we are resident, except at school – it was only after eleven years in Dubai that I read one of Sheikh Mohammed's books, 'My Vision: Challenges in the Race for Excellence' – an interesting perspective he has ☺. I might read English works from the time of the reformation debates in the Anglican Church in the 1500s. Reading stuff older than that becomes a little harder because it needs translations – consider this description of a young man from the 1400s: With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse, of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse. Of his stature he was of evene lengthe, and wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe. [Canterbury tales] Older than that and even the script has changed: Hwæt! Wé Gárdena in géardagum þéodcyninga þrym gefrúnon· (Listen! We of the Spear-Danes, in the days of old, of the clan kings, heard of their glory) This is the first two opening lines of Beowulf - only university students read this stuff and we still have a copy from University days – it is a rendition of a 1200 year old Danish story, part of my own nation's heritage now, but this is in English that is only 1000 years old. Why then would the church want everyone to listen to a book, written from 2000 to 3,500 years ago, about a small Hebrew speaking nation far far away? In the church's favour, it does not prefer you to read it in the original languages like Muslims and the Koran.

The reason it is good to read is that this collection of writings is not simply about a small nation far far away. It's about God and his dealings with humankind, and we should all be interested that, amazing though it is that it is focussed in this tiny setting so far away. People in the UK used to consider this book so important that Hebrew ways of speaking have even entered the language: In the British newspaper The Independent, journalist Boyd Tonkin was writing during the 400th anniversary celebrations of the King James Version: "In a secular age where ignorance of religion goes from strength to strength (Psalms 84:7) among lovers of filthy lucre (1 Timothy 3:8) who only want to eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:19), we know for a certainty (Joshua 23:13) that these resonant words endure as a fly in the ointment (Ecclesiastes 10:1) and a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7) of the powers that be (Romans 13:1). They can still set the teeth on edge (Jeremiah 31:29) of those who try to worship God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). But does this ancient book, proof that there is no new thing under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), now cast its pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), and act as a voice crying in the wilderness (Luke 3:4) -- a drop in a bucket (Isaiah 40:15) of unbelief, no longer a sign of the times (Matthew 16:3) but a verbal stumbling-block (Leviticus 19:14)?" When we read the writing on the wall (Daniel 5), or escape by the skin of our teeth (Job 19.20) or use words such as "long-suffering", "scapegoat" and "peacemaker" we are unconsciously quoting the 1611 KJV translation of Hebrew idiom.

This is all interesting enough but we are not reading the bible so that we can become familiar with the roots of many English proverbs and sayings. It became the root of so many sayings because it has an importance for us beyond that of a normal collection of ancient writings – it is a history of God's developing revelation of himself to the world culminating in Jesus Christ. Whilst God's invisible

nature, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made ever since the creation of the world (Romans 1.20^a), and whilst it can be said therefore that somehow human beings have always ‘known’ God, the writings of the bible show the inadequacies and development of that knowledge in its many different writings.

Old Testament

The most influential man who has ever lived, the man more people take as their guide than any other person in history, used the Old Testament as the main base of writings for his thinking about God. If only for this we should take an interest in it. It is a collection of writings, some ‘myth’, some history, some poetry, some prophecy, each genre with its own demands for interpretation, sometimes the genres confused together in the same text. When advising people how to read the whole bible I sometimes give tips on how to get through some of the ‘boring’ sections but one person I encouraged to read it found they ‘came alive’ when they started reading Leviticus and Deuteronomy – they worked at the Crown Court in England and found that they were witnessing day by day the same legal conundrums in debate, and time and again the British legal system had taken the Old Testament line on legal issues which she was now discovering for the first time. At weddings, I usually give the couple a bible and put the bookmark in Song of Songs as a relevant place to start on the honeymoon!

Psalms

There are riches of emotion expressed in the Psalms which are simply not available in most modern songs – we water our emotions down to a shallow bandwidth of praise and worship, with occasional glimpses of history (Christmas carols and Easter songs). It is rare in our songs, even in Funeral hymns, to face death, bereavement and sorrow as we prefer either to look back with a positive song to the life lived or to look on to assurance of the future life, but in the Psalms there is a richness of bitterness, emptiness, sorrow, death, vengeance, pleas for help (lots of those), fear of God (is he not awesome?), doubt, despair, betrayal, trust in God (he is awesome!), celebration of his guidance and law, his creation, his presence, the history of God with his people, expressions of love, joy, peace, wonder, forgiveness, blessing, and celebration of recounting the family history in worship, a people walking with God.

People will say how they want positive things when they come to worship, and bitter songs are of course unpopular for regular weekly services, but today (as I write) I visited a girl in prison who is due for release soon, and came out of hospital (whilst still in prison) to discover that her father had died and she would never see him again – why could God not have kept him alive until the end of her sentence? Also today I have tried to fix up a visit with a couple I married last year whose baby has just died. There are no hymns in our book to help express the feelings that must arise, but in the psalms I find them. Sometimes the extracts we have from the psalms seem a little too bitter for a church service – the most striking being psalm 137 where we read: ‘O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy the one who pays you back for what you have done to us!’ which seems a bit un-Christian, but is followed by another sentiment which is not just un-Christian but totally immoral

^a Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

and even inhuman: 'Happy shall he be who takes your little ones, and dashes them against the rock!' There is no hymn in all the hymn books I've ever had which can express such hellish emotion as this and yet elements of the 16 year old punk rocker I once was, full of bitter and angry passion, with a need for a religion meaty enough to cope with such things, still lives in me and finds solace in such things. God is big enough to accept our rawest emotions within his holy book as well as hymns of purest praise and love!

New Testament/Epistles

The New Testament readings in church come from the various letters written to the first congregations of believers – the first people who stood up to attest and proclaim that Jesus is Lord. These letters provide intimate acquaintance with the people, vision and strivings of the earliest members of our Christian family. They are a record of the issues that our forebears faced and reading them we come face to face with the tensions and joys of living by the Christian faith. To understand them it is helpful to have some background in Old Testament thinking – another reason to be familiar with that part of the bible – and it is also helpful to have some understanding of New Testament times in order to understand it, though some understanding of these times comes from reading the letters!

Gospels

Jesus has been the most influential man who has ever lived, the man more people take as their guide than any other person in history, and the Gospels give four eyewitness accounts of what he was like and what he did while on this earth. Isn't that enough to make you see the value in reading it? The fact that is isn't written the way we'd write a history nowadays, so what? It's what we've got as the earliest source on his life. The fact that the gospels spend such a disproportionate amount on the last week of Jesus' life is disappointing to those who were looking for the writings of a guru, but in that very weighting of subject matter lies a deep secret. If it still be a mystery to you, is it not better to be familiar with the words until God works in you to give you insight to understand?

Proclaiming the reading

The reading of these holy words, separated out from all other writings to be our bible, is a privilege and should be done well. The Roman Catholic Church next door to us has a monthly 'Lectors meeting' for about 30 to 45 minutes when they pray, before having a roll call and small 'Proclamation of the Word of God'. Then they introduce new readers, review related matters, and distribute the readings for the next 3 months. They have a fixed seat in church where the lesson reader sits, recognizing by this that the reading of the bible to a public gathering is an important and honoured role.

Here's some advice they start with: 'Proclaiming the Word of God is much more than just reading it. It can be a powerfully prayerful experience for you – one that you share with the entire congregation. The key to effective proclamation lies in understanding the meaning, the lesson, which is contained within the words you are about to read.' That line puts my congregation's handling of the scriptures to shame I think – and my guidance of them! They also recommend that you familiarise yourself with all three readings so that you understand the tone and the flow of the entire Liturgy of the Word for that service, giving attention to tone and pace, pauses and

pronunciation. In other words, they encourage their readers to see the reading as part of the whole service, not as an isolated bit that they do alone. Preparation in advance, before you get to church even, is assumed. To be requested as you arrive in church, ‘would you mind doing the lesson?’, with you replying ‘if the person down for it doesn’t turn up then I suppose I’ll do it’, would be insulting to the task.

There is practical advice on holding the microphone followed by: ‘Don’t be in a hurry because the Mass cannot proceed without you in any case. You are the important person now; the one who is going to impart the Word of God to the congregation’. They follow this with, ‘since the congregation is supposed to listen to you...read slowly, taking time to look up at the congregation when you speak to them. Look them in the eye to get their attention and to keep them listening to the Word of God.’

The leaflet finishes with, ‘Never be in a hurry. Don’t eat (mumble) your words. Be gracious. Communicate a sense of prayerfulness and reverence... Your dress and appearance should be such that it does not draw attention to yourself. Being a lector is a ministry. It is also a calling, a vocation. It is a ministry within the body of Christ. It is a calling of service to that same Body. The effective lector not only pays attention to the mechanics of proclaiming the Word, but also to his or her relationship with the Lord and his People. This means that each of us must work on maintaining an active spiritual and prayerful life on both the personal and communal levels’.

I might be wrong, but I think it is rare for someone reading the lesson to be filled with wonder that they are able to read the word of God and make it known to those sitting in front of them. Shouldn’t we pray before we read, remembering the value of the inheritance we are about to pass on? Shouldn’t we be careful to read in such a way, as the old prayer book puts it, ‘as may best be heard of all such as are present’. Shouldn’t we dress in such a way that shows some respect for what we are about to do? I am often more concerned to not hurt someone’s feelings than to tell them that next time they really need to practice the reading, speak up, or tell them that with the bright window behind them their skirt is a bit thin! And here’s me thinking I held the bible in high regard!

For discussion

1. The older denominations often have more Bible reading in their services than many an independent evangelical church (we have four extracts each week – OT, Psalm, NT, Gospel). Why is it then that independent churches often know their bible better?
2. How much do you think your theological knowledge and Christian background is limited to only part of the bible and not actually well rounded?
3. Are some parts of the bible more valuable than others?
4. 2 Tim. 3.16 is often taken to mean that the whole bible can be relied upon but at the time of writing the OT was not yet completely accepted as one set of books beyond dispute, and it can hardly refer to the NT which hadn’t been written yet. What gives the bible authority and who has the right to be the interpreter?
5. In many churches, when they come to read the gospel, they stand, and may have a procession, which may have candles and cross bearer and the reader may bow and kiss the bible when finishing

– all this making an outward demonstration of the importance with which we hold this gift of revelation from God and appreciation that we have it. For many years I have said with my words that it was a most valuable book, but on my bedside table I have often used it simply as a coaster rather than make space for my hot chocolate, and in church, if there wasn't room on the pew shelf in front might put it on the floor, two actions unthinkable to many in the Middle East. How much do you appreciate the message of the bible and value it being revealed to you? Would an outsider see that in the way you treat your written version of it?

5. Do some Christians replace Jesus with the bible, the Word with the word, in practice?

Chapter 6 – Psalms and Music

In chapter 3, when I was talking about openings and greetings, I said that an opening piece of music has been a standard while the ministers enter since at least the 5th century, i.e. it was so established that it was written into the record. Most churches would assume that music and instruments are part of worship (though one denomination I know considers musical accompaniment to be anathema and sing everything acapella). Music has a very influential part to play in our learning and worship. It is so important that in the Anglican Church in the USA (called the Episcopal Church there) they formally approve their hymn book in both Houses of the General Convention before it is used – their hymn book authorised by the top authorities. In England they are so used to the freedom of using hymns from such a variety of different churches and backgrounds I don't think they'd be able to do that, and yet the American church has a good point – we remember catchy words and tunes much more readily, so if we go to such lengths to authorise the words of the liturgy, why not the hymn books too? The Gloria (see text box to the right) is an ancient hymn that by the 4th century was becoming an approved part of the liturgy. The opening is clearly from Luke 2.14^a, the Christmas story, and taking away the sin of the world seems clearly a reference to John 1.29^b (though I suggest other options in chapter 10). Many

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you,
we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ,
only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the
right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

^a 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

^b The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

of the sentiments we have in our hymns and songs are also expressed in the Psalms so we can point there, if we want biblical backing for it. It is clear that music and song was part of the Hebrew expression of faith, and from Exodus 15^a onwards it is clear that music and dance has been a normal part of religious expression. I spoke in the last chapter though about how narrow our expression of feeling is when compared with a hymnbook like the Psalms. I do wonder sometimes how rich our worship is when our music is such a small subset of what could be experienced. The book of Psalms was one major song book that Jesus used and I am sad that it is not used so much today, despite our claiming to follow Jesus. It has such riches of emotion but these are not always easy to express in a general service. It has not always been that hymn writers have been as bland as they can appear to be today - There are various hymns of old which do not make it into modern hymn books which meditate on the fate of those who go to Hell (an Advent hymn by Isaac Watts springs to mind, in the text box) whatever we think of the theology of it, it is a meditation which for its very power would not be included in any hymn book today and I find it hard to think what tune they must have sung it to when first published at the turn of the 16th century! My trouble with general hymn books (produced for all churches to use) is not normally with such bitter themes, more that they are so dominated by salvation, praise, and love that I don't find much on salvation

^a Exodus 15.1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord... 20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them...

Hymn by Isaac Watts

When the fierce north wind with his airy forces
Rears up the Baltic to a foaming fury,
And the red lightning with a storm of hail comes
Rushing amain down,

How the poor sailors stand amazed and tremble,
While the hoarse thunder, like a bloody trumpet,
Roars a loud onset to the gaping waters,
Quick to devour them!

Such shall the noise be and the wild disorder,
(If things eternal may be like these earthly)
Such the dire terror, when the great Archangel
Shakes the creation,

Tears the strong pillars of the vault of heaven,
Breaks up old marble, the repose of princes;
See the graves open, and the bones arising,
Flames all around 'em!

Hark, the shrill outcries of the guilty wretches!
Lively bright horror and amazing anguish
Stare through their eyelids, while the living worm lies
Gnawing within them.

Thoughts like old vultures prey upon their heart-strings,
And the smart twinges, when the eye beholds the
Lofty Judge frowning, and a flood of vengeance
Rolling afore him.

Hopeless immortals! how they scream and shiver,
While devils push them to the pit wide-yawning
Hideous and gloomy, to receive them headlong
Down to the center.

Stop here, my fancy: (all away ye horrid
Doleful ideas); come, arise to Jesus;
How He sits God-like! and the saints around him
Throned, yet adoring!

Oh may I sit there when he comes triumphant
Dooming the nations! then ascend to glory
While our hosannas all along the passage
Shout the Redeemer.

history, the church, Communion, repentance, marriage, death (except as victory), living in anticipation (Advent or Lent) and more, or songs that include sadness, doubt, pain, or struggling that I'd also want to express to God in worship at certain times.

Another modern feature of worship arises because we are so influenced by having so much personal choice, and are so used to high quality entertainment. With such high standards of entertainment and professional music as the norm on our iPods, phones and surround sound technology, church seems so second rate – even at parties, people don't present their 'party pieces' any more but substitute personal contribution with loud professional 'background music' (a misnomer at most events if ever there was one) and expert entertainers. I have thought sometimes that it would be better to ditch singing hymns all together because 40 tired people coming straight from work, scattered across our 800 seater church singing hymns they're not quite sure of sounds so weak it would put off any newcomers wouldn't it? It wouldn't impress anyone.

Does my desire that people should be impressed by our church arise from a desire that they should be entertained/happy or from a desire that they should meet God? My motives are not pure. Who nowadays wants to sing songs with the amateur guitar player or the grade 3 piano player when you can have a fifty strong choir and professional organist backing you up over our sound system straight from YouTube! Only follow that logic and you will end up with no place for anyone below professional standard to offer their talent in the service of God. The Passover/Christian family dynamic will have gone, leaving a collection of entertained observers rather than a fellowship of believers. What is the biblical position on music in worship? It seems to me that temple worship at its best was loud and professional but also exuberant (2 Chronicles 5.11-14^a; Nehemiah 12.24, 27-43, 46-47^b; Psalm 150^c)

The accompaniment to you may sometimes be more like the clashing cymbals of Psalm 150, but remember the person playing is offering their best as an offering to God, not to impress you (for all that we would like you to be impressed). It is there to help you join in with the singing or to help lift your heart and mind in prayer. When the organist doesn't get it quite

^a 11 Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions), 12 all the levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters. 13 It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

^b 27 ...they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. 43 They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

^c 3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! 6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

right, treat them as they treat you when you don't get it right – they don't stop playing. Of course if the accompaniment is not helping you to sing up, it may be best to sing acapella – on some hymns, when the organ has died (loose wire on the power socket) my congregations have taken off! And if you don't know the tunes, whose fault is that? How much time did you give to learning them? Get yourself added to the choir email list so you can look the hymns up on YouTube before you come (regardless of whether you are going to join the choir or not). Together do your best and rejoice that a person who sings as well as you do, and plays as well as they do, are both able to offer to God a song in the house of God, as you are able. You are trying to be part of a fellowship where all have a part to play.

For discussion

1. What emotions, thoughts, or teachings do you think are not fairly represented in the music in church?
2. When you bring your friends to church is your dominant hope for them that they enjoy it, or that God 'touch' them? You know the 'right' answer, but is that the true one? What are you embarrassed by, should your friends come and see your church? Is your answer to that more a comment on you or the culture of your friends?
3. Music – what can you do to get more out of it when musicians are imperfect, the congregation is small, and you don't know the tunes? Ezra 3.10-13 is perhaps an extreme case, but there is a place for the wildly exuberant isn't there? How can a church achieve excellence, and yet give chance for the less qualified but godly player to offer what they can?
4. If music is but one part of a service, how can it be made to serve the liturgy rather than become a focus in itself?

Chapter 7 – Creed and Intercessory Prayers

There are different types of prayer and in the church service so far we have already had some praise with music, we've had some humbling of ourselves and some confession. We have taken the presence of God to heart in these things and in the absolution after confession. We may even have meditated prayerfully during the bible readings. All this is prayer, but now comes a part of the service where one of the demands of coming to church is made rather more obvious – that is the demand of concentration. You might think this is more appropriate for the sermon – that a sermon has always accompanied bible readings is clear from some of the bible quotes given in chapter 5 – but no, although the sermon may improve with your thoughtful attention, I am speaking of the intercessions. To set the scene for the intercessions is usually the Nicene Creed. The Creed reminds us of who we pray to and thus sets the scene as we turn to ask him for help. The Nicene Creed was agreed the last time that the entire church community worldwide agreed upon something altogether – at a gathering of church leaders from all over the Christian Church at Nicea in 325AD. This creed became therefore an important basis of what defines a 'Christian' church. (The 'and the son' was added unilaterally at the Council of Toledo by the Western Church in 589AD, which is why, if you go to an ecumenical service with Eastern Churches represented, that line is missed out.) In the West the Nicene Creed has been said on Sundays in worship since 1014AD. I am not going to unpack the creed in this series and show the biblical basis for each part of it, but point you to many of the Psalms to find a basis why a statement of faith is part of worship – frequently the Psalms remember God's great deeds in the

Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came
down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and
the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the
Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the
living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the
Son,**

**who with the Father and the Son is
worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and
apostolic Church.**

**We acknowledge one baptism for the
forgiveness of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.**

Amen.

past, particularly those of the Exodus story, as a basis for prayer in the present (Pss 66, 74, 83). The creed is not a boring bit to be gone through before the prayers, but a celebration of God's deeds and character before asking him favours. It has been thought about very thoroughly, each phrase tested and found needful to protect some portion of the truth about our wonderful God. I bet you can't read it slowly, thinking a little about each line, believing it for yourself, and then tell me it's boring. This is the God we are about to pray to.

Up until this part of the service you may have merely enjoyed the hymns, spoken the prayer of confession, and heard the bible readings and sermon. Though the sermon might make some demands on you to concentrate, most preachers will allow that if a particular point grabs you and you spend the rest of the sermon mentally browsing that point then that's fine. We do not usually expect that every point made will be equally applicable to every listener. But now, after reciting the creed, you then are asked very often to concentrate in a more focused way.

I am fond of bringing peace to worried parents who are afraid that God is judging them for their lack of concentration. They can't concentrate during the service on what is happening because they have to spend so much time picking their children up from under the pew, or picking up crayons, or sitting with a little child as it does the puzzles on the children's notice leaflet. They can't see the point in coming to church if they don't enter into the service meaningfully. I sympathise, but for a few years they may have to just accept that their prayers in church may be more in body than in spirit – their physical presence though in the service is itself a statement of devotion and worship, and teaches their children that church is an important and normal part of life. I have met very few families who took a break from church because of the children's rugby or whatever who have come back before their children left home, if at all – a generation unfamiliar with peace in worship is so easily achieved! Bringing children to church, even if at the cost of not being able to concentrate on the service for a while, is very much encouraged. It is difficult sometimes to bring up children within the life and worship of the church and there are limits to what we can welcome in a service – which is why we have a crèche room with a window into the church and the sound piped in, and not out ☺. Stuck in the crèche room a parent wonders even more what the point is of coming to church when they can't concentrate! Be patient, the children will learn much that is good if you keep coming.

The dissatisfaction with not being able to concentrate reflects a habit of practice that is under normal circumstances an essential requirement of modern thinking about church services. In our individualistic societies we expect each person to 'enter in' to the service – meaning we expect them to hear the words, understand them, and reflect them in their own hearts towards God. Nowhere is this more evident than the intercessions. There are few other places where the service leader says something to point us in a certain direction and then leaves a silence where we are supposed to be thinking about that specific thing: 'In our intercessions today let us pray for those who are sick – I invite you to remember those

known to you who are sick at this time...' and then follows a moment of silence when you are supposed to actually call to mind those you know who are sick and to think of them and pray for them, on your own.

Are the intercessions in your church good? If you mean by this, are they expressed in an articulate way that is in keeping with your own manner of speech, then you have missed the point. YOU are supposed to be praying here and the answer lies with you. You are supposed to be thinking about what they are saying and how good they are depends then on what you do with their words. If you echo their words to God, interceding to God on behalf of those who they name, then the intercessions were good. If you day dream and think vague thoughts through the silence until you are brought round to consciousness by 'Lord, in your mercy' and you jump back to the present on autopilot saying, 'hear our prayer', then the intercessions, however magnificently worded, were not good.

This element of 'entering in' to a service is always a key component for what you will get out of it. It is nice also when God is present, but what we mean by that in practice is whether you feel it or not, and that seems to me to be a bit random. As a teenager, even before I became a Christian and started following Christ myself, I was used to prayer. I'd been brought up in church, sung in the church choir, went to the church youth group. I liked going because it was fun and my friends were there, though I had decided in my early teens that Christianity as such wasn't for me. Each evening's activities ended with an 'Epilogue', a time where everyone sat down in a big circle round the room, and we had a 'religious bit' with perhaps a bible reading, but always a prayer. It wasn't my thing but it was part of the deal and I was used to it – you come to the club, you join the prayers at the end. One week I remember a Jewish friend from school was visiting and he decided he'd come along and enjoy it. We had a good evening and he enjoyed it, and when we came to the prayers at the end he was of course there too, but when it was time to go he shot out and exclaimed to me as we walked home, 'wow! That was really spooky!' It was too much for him! He 'felt' this spirit in the room as soon as we started to pray and his skin prickled! I was amazed. It all seemed very normal to me.

Sometimes, when you are used to being with the things of God in church, you miss what is right under your nose. We had all night prayer meetings sometimes too – I didn't pray but I enjoyed being there and made tea all night for the others. I was comfortable being alongside the activities of God while my friends entered into it. We can witness, and be comfortable with great things while our unseeing eyes, unsmelling noses, unhearing ears, insensitive skin remains unmoved while an outsider may feel goosebumps, and I want you to feel those goosebumps too when people gather to pray and one way to do that is to allow yourself to participate.

This all sounds lovely, but is it biblical? I struggle a little with this. In the OT there is no commandment concerning prayer that I can remember, not in terms of a legally regulated divine service and certainly no commandment to concentrate in an introspective way. There

are plenty of prayers – a whole book of them in the psalms – and more throughout the bible. There are examples of individuals at prayer (Daniel 9^a, Luke 6.12^b, Mark 6.46-48^c) and examples of communal prayer (Esther 4.15,16^d; and Acts 12.12-16^e). There are commandments about sacrifices and the ordering of temple worship, and records that there was singing and music with instruments, but I don't find commandments about prayers even though there is an assumption that people will pray (2 Chronicles 6.32ff^f). Even in the Passover, the actions are mentioned, and the necessity of gathering, but not the prayers.

Why might this be?

In the New Testament there are encouragements to pray (Matthew. 6.5-15^g; 7.7^h 1 Corinthians 7.5ⁱ; 1 Tim 2.1^j) but I don't find it full of commandments to pray but rather an assumption that you will pray.

This assumption that intercession and prayer should be part of our practice of religious life is there in part because our religion has at its heart a relationship with someone and there is no relationship without communication. If indeed we love, then we will have concerns so long as the world is not perfect. The expression of those concerns is intercession. Prayer is a lot more than presenting a shopping list of requests to God, but this particular section is focused on that asking aspect of prayer. I hope you will never think of this as the main

^a 3 I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments

^b Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.

^c 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by.

^d 15 Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, 16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

^e 12 ...he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. 13 When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14 On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." 16 Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed.

^f 32 "Likewise when foreigners, who are not of your people Israel, come from a distant land because of your great name, and your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, 33 may you hear from heaven your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigners ask of you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel

^g 5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; ...6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door... 7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do;... 9 "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven...

^h 7 "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

ⁱ 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 This I say by way of concession, not of command.

^j First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone

activity of prayer – it is important also to learn that prayer is a response to God, not simply something we do in response to our own needs and feelings, on our own initiative only. As an antidote to thinking that prayer is basically our response to God I find Eugene Peterson helpful (from *The Contemplative Pastor*): ‘I realise I have a need or I am happy, and I pray. The emphasis is on me, and I have the sense when I pray that I started something. But what happens if I go to church? I sit there and somebody stands before me and says, ‘let us pray’. I didn’t start it; I’m responding. Which means I am humbled. My ego is no longer prominent. No that’s a very basic element in prayer, because prayer is answering speech. Prayer has to be a response to what God has said. The worshipping congregation...is the place where I learn how to pray. From it I go to my closet or to the mountains and continue to pray. A second thing ... is that, when I pray in a congregation, my feelings are not taken into account. Nobody asks me when I enter the congregation, ‘how do you feel today? What do you feel like praying about?’ So the congregation is a place where I’m gradually learning that prayer is not conditioned or authenticated by my feelings. Nothing is more devastating to prayer than when I begin to evaluate my prayer by my feelings.’

For Discussion

1. Is the creed boring? If so, why? NB what I said about repetition in Chapter 3.
2. Do you usually concentrate during the intercessions, or use the silences to ‘take a break’? How much does this reflect your attitude to the whole service – are you here to receive or to give and if both, then in what proportion?
3. What would make ‘good’ intercessions?
4. Why is personal, individual concentration so important, and why is it not really mentioned as a requirement in the bible?

Chapter 8 – The Peace

The sharing of the Peace is a small part of the service, unless you belong to a church where everyone needs to shake the hand of everyone else in which case it can take a while. Even so, you might not think it deserves a whole chapter on it, but it is a very significant moment in the service. There are quite a few references in the New Testament to sharing the peace that came with a kiss: Romans 16.16^a; 1 Corinthians 16.20^b; 2 Corinthians 13.12^c; 1 Thessalonians 5.26^d; 1 Peter 5.14^e and here of course it is in the context of greeting which we naturally assume would come at the beginning of a service. But this is different. We have reached a moment of intimacy clearly which many of us would shy away from expressing in such a way to all these strangers around us and the good reserved ‘British’ way is to shake hands. You are never invited to shake hands though but to exchange a sign of peace, and for many, the Peace is just the same as a greeting mid service, and they may even greet those they know and ask them how they are, even ignoring those they don’t know! But why on earth would there be a mere greeting in the middle of a service? There must be more to it than that.

The Peace has little to do with Passover, but everything to do with celebrating with who’s IN and not with who’s OUT. The people sheltered by the blood of the lamb were IN, and safe (see chapter 2). Those who do not come IN to the house are OUT and in danger. The Peace, historically, is the moment we move from a service which is for anyone to be part of, to the part for the exclusive few, the movement from common room to inner sanctuary, from the profane to the holy.

In modern culture there is a resistance to the idea that not all are equal. Surely there should be no dividing of people into common/elite, accessible/exclusive. Surely we want to make all our church life accessible and open to any who wish to come! Actually no. The bible is clear that not everyone should be included (1 Corinthians 5^f) That there would be a divide between people allowed in and those not was a natural distinction to the early church – the early Jewish converts seeing themselves still as Jews, forming a synagogue, continuing the Hebrew traditions but now with a Messiah, would have no consciousness of a break between ‘Old Testament times’ and the present (what we would now call ‘New Testament times’). For them there was simply continuity of worship practices with the change of Messianic expectation being now present reality. Just as the temple made distinction between Jew and Gentile, so the early church will have assumed a distinction between Christian and pagan. The temple buildings themselves spoke a message: ‘approach God with care!’. It will have been natural to continue that in other places – it was not for just anyone to come near to the holy.

^a Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

^b All the brothers and sisters send greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

^c Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

^d Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.

^e Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

^f 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister[c] who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one.

In the early church they were much more wary of accepting newcomers straightaway – you don't have to read much of the book of Acts to see why – they were at times persecuted! For anyone claiming to convert, there was a period of teaching that preceded acceptance into the fellowship: In The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (written c215AD) we see that a convert had to undergo investigation of their background and seriousness of conversion, before receiving three years of 'hearing the word' as a Catechumen before they could be baptised and accepted. This is what happened after 'hearing the word' as he calls it: 'When the teacher has finished giving instruction, let the catechumens pray by themselves, separated from the faithful; ... and when they have finished praying, they shall not give the Peace, for their kiss is not yet holy. But let only the faithful greet one another, men with men and women with women; but the men shall not greet the women ... After their prayer, when the teacher has laid hands on the catechumens, he shall pray and dismiss them.' In the context of our order of service, they were allowed to stay in until just after the intercessions, and then they had to leave. And yet, although they were not accepted to share the Peace or take the bread and wine they were considered, as catechumens, to be fully 'saved': 'If a catechumen is arrested for the name of the Lord, let him not be in two minds about his witness. For if he suffers violence and is killed (before his baptism) for the forgiveness of his sins, he will be justified for he has received baptism in his blood.'

We are so used to hearing Jesus words 'take, eat, this is my body', 'drink this, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant' that it all seems normal – but how normal is it to eat someone's body and drink their blood! What an extraordinary thing to say! Our Danish priest read the introduction to this book and saw me describing the church as weird and couldn't really see it, until the following week she was leading a service as was struck by the strangeness of this body and blood language! Some early disciples were so offended by Jesus teaching on this point that they walked off in a huff! (John 6.35-66 – isn't it interesting that '666' is a symbol of being against God in the book of Revelation^a, and it's John 6.66^b where people abandon following Jesus! Don't get side tracked by this.) The early church was so misunderstood by some non-Christians listening in to their prayers and discussions that the early church was at times accused of cannibalism. In tense times such a rumour could bring violent crowds down on a Christian gathering and the exclusion of anyone but the 'faithful' in hearing the Communion prayers was in part a safeguard against persecution. As a result, only the 'faithful' were allowed to share the Peace and take the Communion.

Having finished what we might now call the 'Liturgy of the Word' (the first half of the service before the Peace), the early believers would celebrate the 'Liturgy of the Sacrament' in privacy, starting with a sharing of the Peace. This is one way that some churches in the UK today use this moment in the liturgy, to make it easier for un-churched folk to attend for songs, bible reading and teaching, and then to go to the hall for coffee, before continuing with 'the faithful' sharing the Peace in the context now of a table spread for a meal. This can create a break in the service which disturbs those staying for the meal (indeed breaking too long to greet everybody with noisy friendliness can do the same). Notice that it is not only a greeting – the Peace brings us to a moment of greater depth, a greater intimacy – in the Western Roman liturgy the Peace comes just before they receive the bread

^a Revelation 13.18 This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

^b ...many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

and wine which emphasizes that, where in our church it comes just before the Eucharistic Prayer (the central thanksgiving prayer) but with either there is a feel that we have reached a new stage in the service, the preliminaries are done with, now we are gathering round the table with Jesus in our midst. The Lord is here!

Let me just note a little more the difference between a greeting and sharing peace. Jesus tells the disciples, If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace (Matthew 10.13). He assumes you have a peace to give. The words a presider will often say to introduce this part are these: Christ is our peace (Eph. 2.14), He has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross (Eph. 2.16). We meet in his name (Mt. 18.20) and share his peace (1Th. 5.13). When you share the peace, I encourage you to remind yourself that there's nothing now between you and God, you are at peace with him because of Jesus Christ, and these other people around you are meeting because of Jesus Christ, so you go out there and give them some of his peace – don't just greet them, give them something! That's one difference between a greeting and sharing peace.

[So you can see where the other commonly used introduction comes from: We are the body of Christ (1Cor 12.27) In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body (1Cor 12.13) Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life (Rm 14.19) – the liturgy is packed with the scriptures but not necessarily in neat whole verse quotes but rather quotes and allusions! If you think that some allusions are just coincidence because they are so small, consider what you would think if I said, 'Keep calm and know that I am God' – it's only two words different from 'be still and know that I am God', but if you know the biblical quote, then you know it has been doctored, and if you know where the original 'keep calm and carry on' comes from, it conjures up a totally different background image. A lot of allusions are like this – small snippets where you need to know the background of the speaker/writer!]

Imagine that you have been welcomed into the house, you have had your feet washed so that you might walk clean in God's house, you have gathered to hear some of the heritage of this family that you are sitting with. And now they share a meal – in many cultures the same message is given: eating with someone is somehow recognition of acceptance. If it was in a modern Western house they would rise from the comfortable sofas and chairs and move to the dining room, or if the meal is where you're sitting then that is the point at which the meal is brought in – which interestingly enough is what happens in church: you may not see it because you're busy sharing the peace but the bread and wine is only brought to the table at this point and in the rubric expressly says that this is the moment to prepare the table and bring the bread and wine to the table – it has not been prepared and left here before the service began, which in some ways would be easier to do.

This is a definite turning point in the proceedings and it comes with a new section heading, 'The Liturgy of the Sacrament' (There are four section headings – The Gathering, The Liturgy of the Word, and The Dismissal, are the others). I personally would never turn anyone out of the church at this point and the furthest I go is to ask those who are not baptised, and all who would not normally receive communion in their own church at home, to refrain from receiving the bread and wine, but they can still approach the table and I will pray for them at the step (we have no rail in our church – the very architecture speaks to say we can all come close to God!). What is my rationale for thinking that just anyone should be allowed into this next part? I think it is because I have a basic dislike of

excluding anyone. But do we not call this, Holy Communion? It is not for people who do not share our fellowship in Christ Jesus, so shall we let the strangers just watch? It would be a strange thing to allow others to come and watch me eat at home so they could just hear my family's conversation and see how we eat when we are having our 'family time'.

The Peace then is a sort of greeting, but a greeting with a difference because it comes at a turning point in our service where we enter into something more intimate, a sacramental moment of drawing together. There is a distinction between those who are with us and those who are not. We are sharing the peace that we have found in Christ; not greeting latecomers and random pew-neighbours. We are giving the peace that is in us from the Holy Spirit to fellow Christian pilgrim brothers and sisters round our family table in the presence of Christ.

For discussion

1. How holy is Holy Communion to you? What could you do to make it a bit more separated out from ordinary time, as it were, that this coming moment would be holy?
2. We can look to Jesus life in particular to back up our desire to accept and welcome everyone (Luke 7.1-10, 37ff; 8.1-3; 19.1-10; John 4.7-9; Mark 10.13-16; Luke 23.33,42,43). But similarly, there are many stories in the bible that show that there should be distinctions between the holy and the secular (Exodus 3.1-6; Leviticus 10.1-3; Joshua 5.13-15; 2 Samuel 6 (putting it in a cart was the sin perhaps - disrespectful?); 2 Maccabees 3.13-40; John 2.13-17; Acts 21.27-29; Hebrews 12.28,29; 1 Corinthians 5.9-11 (compare with Luke 7.33-35!) and Matt. 15.24-26 may end well but it shows some boundaries. Is it right that ordinary people should be allowed to participate in our worship and even come up and receive with us where we eat and have fellowship with God? Where in church is the boundary that non-Christians and 'sinners' should not pass?
3. Has sharing the Peace become a simple greeting to you? How can you make all your greetings a little more filled with offering peace? (See also chapter 3, question 1)
4. The Peace marks entry into a special time in the service. Is all your time the same to you? Is there something to the idea of setting aside a holy space in your daily/weekly/yearly life and for your actions in that time to inform and shape your life as a whole? What could you do to establish such a time?

Chapter 9 – the Great Prayer

There are a number of controversies surrounding communion as to what the bread and the wine actually become which you might expect the Eucharistic Prayer to sort out for you now we come to it - Is the communion bread and the wine a physical or spiritual, or only symbolical body and blood of Christ Jesus? We say, as we give the bread and wine, 'the body/blood of Christ keep you in eternal life', and have done so since at least the 6th century, but how we are to interpret this is debated. There are different names you can look up about this too (trans-substantiation – more Roman, con-substantiation – more Lutheran, trans-signification – more evangelical), but there is no single understanding that all Anglicans have agreed on.

I don't find it a hot topic in the churches I know today and it seems to me that there has been an unwillingness to force everyone to a single policy on the matter from the very beginning when during the Reformation, Cranmer gives us the following words for the moment you receive the bread: 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.' He wraps remembrance, faith, and physical reception into one without separating the 'take and eat' from 'the body of our Lord', but includes that this feeding on him comes about by faith. A basic idea surrounding the whole event is that of a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace (a definition from the 1662 Catechism) and I like the wisdom attributed to Queen Elizabeth I: 'Twas God the Word that spake it, He took the Bread and brake it: And what that Word did make it, That I believe and take it' without specifying what precisely that word did make it, though she does go on to talk of how we are made one with him in holy union, when we in Faith receive the Blest Communion. In other words, her focus is not on the bread and wine but on God, which is also the focus of the thanksgiving prayer we come to in this chapter.

In terms of the Passover, which has been the context I have seen as the overriding setting, we have now reached 'saying grace' – a prayer just before we begin to eat. There are several prayers in our book which differ in feel, to be used according to the occasion but most of them have a similar structure and I will talk of the second one mainly (see text box) as the one with the most material from a 3rd century prayer recorded in the Apostolic Tradition (when I was a student this was considered compiled by Hippolytus of Rome (AD170–235) but doubt has arisen since that parts of it may only be from the late 300s – it's still old, and was a source text for many churches revising their liturgies in the 20th century, which is why there's little difference between Anglican and Roman texts these days). All Eucharistic prayers begin with a greeting (remember what I said about the Peace being

Eucharistic Prayer B

The Lord be with you (or) The Lord is here.
and also with you. His Spirit is with us.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give thanks and praise.

a change in scene) which reminds us that God is present, then a call to lift up your hearts to the Lord and give thanks to him. (What does it mean to you to lift up your heart?) There then follows a section reminding of why we can approach God and some of the great things Jesus is to us and the work that he did for us before the next section that remembers the actual last supper. Note again that we give thanks and praise THROUGH Jesus Christ (I mentioned this when talking of the Prayer of Humble Access in chapter 3), but not just Jesus Christ but 'beloved Son' (God's words at Jesus baptism), and living word (John 1.1,14^a; Hebrews 4.12^b), through whom he created all things ((John 1.3^c; Colossians 1.16^d), sent (John 3.17^e) and so on. I am not going to give bible quotes to show the backups for all the prayer but encourage you to see how carefully biblical material is the source of inspiration and is alluded to throughout – in the Anglican Church we have no constitution but our liturgy is one important place where we set out what we believe so we do not allow the priest to say what he likes but rather make sure that what he says, in places that matter, is an authorised text that teaches orthodox teachings of the church. I encourage you to look closely at each phrase in the prayers here and consider what each bit adds to the prayer – in this section to tell us about the greatness of Jesus Christ.

There follows a Proper Preface – this means the leader can put something in reflecting the season of the year (Advent, Christmas, and so on) or other special focus of the day (Saints of old, harvest, election of a Church Council etc) as a specific reason for us 'therefore' to proclaim his great and glorious name. But note the context here – it's not just us who are gathered round worshipping God, but all the company of heaven – we are with those who were up before us: we do not start the worship at 9.30am or whenever, we join it.

Father, we give you thanks and praise through your beloved Son Jesus Christ, your living Word, through whom you have created all things; who was sent by you in your great goodness to be our Saviour. By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh; as your Son, born of the blessed Virgin, he lived on earth and went about among us; he opened wide his arms for us on the cross; he put an end to death by dying for us; and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life; so he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people. *Short Proper Preface, when appropriate*
Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

^a In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

^b The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

^c All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

^d for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

^e Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The congregational response to that is a reference to Isaiah 6.3^a and Jesus entry to Jerusalem (Matthew. 21.9^b) which refers to Psalm 118.26. Jesus uses the same phrase in Matthew 23.39 in the context of the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem, remembering also perhaps that the Psalm also talks of the stone the builders rejected (v22^c). The context of our worship is both the heavenly court and temple with sacrifice, which we are about to recall in the next section.

There are four things that the celebrant will always do to imitate the actions of Jesus at his last supper: take the bread and wine, thank God for it, break the bread, and share it out. This is referred to here and the Spirit is asked to be present. It is a Western approach to ask what precisely is the holiest moment – is it when we recall the actual words of Jesus at his last supper, or when we ask the Spirit to come? I encourage you to take the whole together, and wrapped in the Spirit, know his presence as the remembrance of that event is made present.

So far the body of the prayer has been based on an ancient Western rite, but now comes something from an ancient Syrian rite, brought to us via the Church of South India rite in 1948 as the Anglican church sought to be true to early texts of Christendom: The acclamation of the heart of our faith – that Christ died, is risen, and will come again. There are four different versions to choose from but this is most commonly used. This interjection by the congregation after the somewhat sombre reminder of Jesus looming death lifts our hearts to the conquering of death and the looking forward to a new day when he will come again and all will be well again.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Lord, you are holy indeed, the source of all holiness; grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit, and according to your holy will, these gifts of bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying: Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Great is the mystery of faith:
**Christ has died:
Christ is risen:
Christ will come again.**

^a And one [Seraph/Angel] called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

^b The crowds that went ahead of Jesus and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

^c The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

The celebrant then goes back briefly to Hippolytus' text with 'calling to mind', 'rejoicing', 'looking for' and 'celebrate' showing us what our part is and there is no need to cower in fear but we have confidence to stand in God's presence boldly (Deuteronomy 10.8^a; Daniel 7.10^b; Hebrews 4.16^c). If you think this is not a big deal, consider Esther's fear of standing before her king (Esther 4.11^d) and know that God is greater! There is another petition for the Holy Spirit, and a reminder of our worship hall being rather larger than the four walls of the church, including as it does the great company of saints in heaven, before concluding with another compact bit of theology – 'through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom and with whom and in whom'. The person and work of Jesus Christ directs our honour and glory to God – why we do it, who it is we are honouring, and how we honour him.

At the end of many Eucharistic prayers the conclusion is phrased with a congregational response: 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours for ever and ever. Amen'. Although the prayer I have chosen to highlight doesn't have this, I can't resist mentioning it as we have it so often. It comes from Revelation 5.13^e – just look at the context of that verse and tell me that if you remember that context as you say it, it will not move you! And the four living creatures said, Amen! And we all fall down and worship! Only we don't, because we are too conscious of being on earth and it would be embarrassing, but there have been many times when I wished I could because I was remembering the context of this verse, the context of our worship.

I have favourite parts in all the prayers in my book (to see them all online see the links on <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/principal-services/holy-communion/epsforonefront.aspx>) and I use them according to the service – Prayers A and B

^a At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day

^b A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

^c Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^d 11 All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives.

^e Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

And so, Father, calling to mind his death on the cross, his perfect sacrifice made once for the sins of the whole world; rejoicing in his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming in glory, we celebrate this memorial of our redemption. As we offer you this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, we bring before you this bread and this cup and we thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you. Send the Holy Spirit on your people and gather into one in your kingdom all who share this one bread and one cup, so that we, in the company of [N and] all the saints, may praise and glorify you for ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory be yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.

Amen.

are 'normal' though Prayer B emphasises salvation history more, Prayer C reminds people of the old prayer book and is more 'traditional' or penitential, Prayer D reminds of Holy Week and other times when rescue is the focus, Prayer E is designed to go with a seasonal first section of the prayer (significantly D and E replaces 'disciples' with 'friends' and uses short sentences and narrative style to help children find it accessible), Prayer F influenced by the liturgy of St. Basil is more 'Eastern' in feel with vivid imagery, Prayer G is from the Roman Catholic Church, looks more at God in creation, and has a lovely reference to God as mother while Prayer H is often used simply when vicars know they are short of time, which is a shame as its intention is to give a more collaborative feel of the body of Christ in worship.

I invite you to read them all through when you want to meditate on something good.

For discussion

1. Have a look through the various prayers (link online above), choose one, and see how many bible verses you think you can remember that 'go with it' – you may not remember chapter and verse, but if you can remember the story/reference that's OK for the purpose.
2. I refer to being caught up so much by the context that 'we all fall down and worship'. Isaiah was pretty caught up (Isaiah 6) but still had presence of mind to offer himself for service. We do not look for emotionalism, but informed wonder and praise. Is there a tension for you between 'concentrating' on the service and being caught up to heaven by it?
3. Jesus actions and the last supper are the main context – how can we make that context 'present experience' more effectively?

Chapter 10 – the Great Prayer – before and after

There are various texts which surround the Eucharistic Prayer which come with various biblical overtones for those who know them. In this chapter I have put the questions in the context of each text rather than at the end, but if you are reading this in a group setting and time is pressing, decide which questions you will focus on for discussion rather than taking them all in order.

When the collection of people's offerings of money is taken before the Eucharistic prayer, the words many will know at that point are, 'Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.' This comes from 1 Chronicles 29.11,12 in response to the generosity of the people who have brought what is necessary to build and decorate the new temple that Solomon will complete. It leaves David humbled. I confess, I am humbled for a different reason when I see what many people offer for God at this point but perhaps the clue for the difference in generosity is the difference in proposed project – grand temple vss electricity bill? Later on of course, raising money for maintenance became a problem (and efficiency and honesty in administration became a problem 2 Kings 12.5-16!) The collection isn't a begging bowl to help the church pay the bills, it is a practical action enabling the people to make an offering to God of their income – in thanksgiving or obedience to God, or in honour of God, or an act of dedication. How can we inspire people to give in such a way that praise would be a natural response to what they have given?

Before the Eucharistic prayer, when the bread and wine is brought to the table, the celebrant may say 'Blessed are you Lord God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread to set before you which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life. Blessed be God for ever.' This, especially the introduction and conclusion, is based on the structure of Jewish table blessings and puts us 'in touch' with our Jewish heritage. Used by the Roman Catholic Church, it was adapted by the Anglican Church by changing 'to offer' to 'to set before you' – the protestant ethos being afraid of making it look like we add anything to the one offering of Christ on the cross. The way some Israelis today treat Palestinians might lead us to distance ourselves from them, not to mention the fact that God's covenant with them is ended (Hebrews 8.13^a) and a new covenant established (Luke 22.20^b; 1 Corinthians 11.25^c) but we have a Jewish messiah and a Jewish faith. Do you think this prayer, with its Jewish overtones is helpful or is it better to say there is a new covenant now and move on?

^a In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

^b And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

^c In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

The Eucharistic Prayer comes next and has been followed by the Lord's Prayer since the 6th century in the West. I find that a little odd because it seems to me that the Lord's Prayer would more naturally conclude the intercessions, as it does in a Morning Prayer service. The answer comes, I think, in that the intercessions have often been in the context of the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. We see clues to this: in Eucharistic Prayer A, in this section we ask, 'renew us by your Spirit, inspire us with your love, and unite us'; In the last chapter, with Prayer B, you will see that the third part of the prayer asks, 'Send the Holy Spirit on your people and gather into one in your kingdom all who share'. In all the prayers there is a reference to concern for God's people at this point. In the context of Christ made present (with the bread and wine, in remembrance) we make our prayers to him, and it is fitting that we finish our prayers by summing up using the prayer our Saviour taught us. There are whole studies on the Lord's Prayer. What does it mean to you? Has it worked deeper into you or become mindless repetition?

Next comes, 'We break this bread to share in the body of Christ. Though we are many we are one body, because we all share in one bread.' This is from 1 Corinthians 10.17 and in the context shows that participation in the food implies an identification with the sacrifice, or in this case, with Jesus and his body, the church. I find it also interesting that although this is what we do because Jesus did it, the bible speaks of Jesus body being not broken at all (John 19.36^a) and our understanding of breaking the bread is not to mirror his body on the cross so closely (though whether his bones were broken or not, being stricken, pierced, crushed, wounded and killed (Isaiah 53) IS to be broken!). Jesus broke the bread so that they could all have some, and having some they identify with him. For those that are used to wafers – it's a Western idea from the Middle Ages to have 'unleavened' bread (the Eastern Churches tend to have leavened bread), though I don't know if it was to get back to a Passover idea or for practical reasons that it's easier to store and distribute. Does eating together imply a certain acceptance of everyone at table for you, that you are then 'one' together, or are you happy to eat with those you have fallen out with?

After this often comes 'Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace'. This was put here for us to say in the West in AD687 by Pope Sergius but it had been there in several forms for a long time before in East (He was Greek speaking so knew of the riches of the Greek speaking East – what riches lie undiscovered because I only speak English!). You can take it at face value, or you can delve more deeply into biblical echoes which will give you different context on how to understand

^a 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out... 36 These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken."

'lamb of God': Isaiah 53.7-12^a would give a lamb to the slaughter for us a hopelessly sinful nation, as background; John 1.29^b, would give a John the Baptist setting and perhaps a more individual repentance as background, or Revelation 5.6ff^c would give a killed but risen and victorious conqueror to pray to as a context. Which of these three contexts above speaks most to you?

Then comes the invitation to come and eat, 'Draw near with faith etc' which I mentioned at the start of the last chapter, highlighting its careful stepping around different interpretations of what actually we are receiving – the focus of this meal is on Christ, the last supper, being and eating with him, putting ourselves among his family, in his household, all wrapped up together. How you treat the actual bread and wine is affected by what you think it is once you have given thanks for it and all it represents in this context, and you might say, set apart for its special purpose. This study is not going to unpack that but for me, a key ingredient is the communal context in which it has been set apart, or consecrated, and the respect in which those people hold it. What do you think makes something holy or consecrated?

Given the great works outlined in the prayer, and the remembrance of such a great events as we have recalled, having a prayer called the prayer of humble access is surely appropriate now: We do not presume to come to this your table merciful Lord (a large number of Bible references possible here), trusting in our own righteousness but in your manifold and great mercies (Daniel 9.18^d), we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs (Mark 7.28^e), but you are the

^a 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth...8 ...stricken for the transgression of my people... 11 ...The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 ...yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

^b The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

^c 6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. 8 When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; 10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might

and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" 14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

^d We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.

^e But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

same Lord (Hebrews 13.8^a), whose nature is always to have mercy (many verses here!), Grant us ... so to eat the flesh of your dear son (John 6.53^b) etc. This prayer was written by Cranmer in 1548 and shows his protestant side in the biblical references, but his love and sensitivity to God in the sentiments. I will expand on one reference only: the Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite woman gathering crumbs under the table – Mark 7.25-30^c. She was not just any gentile, but a Canaanite – of the race that was cursed by Noah after he found out how immature Canaan's father had been (Genesis 9^d), of the race that was to be driven out of the land when Joshua invaded with the nation of Israel. She is a gentile who should have been wiped off the map long ago. And she comes to a Jew to ask for help – she's bold! She has no Jewish faith, no law, nor religious training, no trappings of piety, but is commended for her great faith! Jesus talks to her, trying to put her off, even insulting her – it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs - How far he pushes her! She accepts the insult, and says, but sir, even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table!

Look at what is going on here – she is ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED that Jesus can and will help her! Jonah doesn't want to go and preach to the Ninevites because he knows God is too strong in mercy to destroy them if they repent, so he runs away! (Jonah 3.10-4.2^e) God has good reasons to destroy Nineveh, so why doesn't he just get on with it? It is because his heart is such that he wants to send them a prophet to give them another chance. This woman has seen something in Jesus that convinces her that even though he has good reasons not to help her, his heart is such that he will! She has such faith in him that she will be bold, overcome the barriers that separate her from him, make her petition and find rejection from Jesus followers, and even finding that Jesus followers are against her, she will still persist in speaking to him. Then, being then reminded of how she is not of

^a Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

^b 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." 52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; 55 for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

^c 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir,[a] even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

^d 20 Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. 21 He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 23 Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers."

^e 10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. 1 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing..."

the children of Jesus' God, not of the fellowship or family of God's people, and that she is not eligible for the food of God's table, even reminded of all this, she still knows that he will help her and comes back with the phrase we know so well, that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. Great is her faith in Jesus indeed! Is your determination to turn to God for assistance strong, or are you easily put off when praying to him for help, assuming that if he doesn't give you a quick answer he doesn't care?

As you come up for communion, with the story of this woman in your mind as you come, remember that you are a gentile, outside of God's people, and more than that, a condemned gentile. There is a great barrier between you and God, and yet, God has broken every barrier down and trusting in his manifold and great mercy we come with boldness to share table fellowship with him. There is no piety or holiness that you can claim, there is no law keeping, no inheritance of his chosen people, it would be as wrong to include you as one of his people as it would be to take good food and give it to the dogs. But God is the same Lord, and as unworthy outsiders we come with the same faith in God's character that the woman had that day with Jesus, that his nature is always to have mercy, and that he not only allows us to gather up the crumbs under his table, but he says, come up here, eat the bread, drink the wine, and have the life and light of Christ flowing in you. Come up to receive the bread and wine with the same faith and humility that was in the heart of that woman who was praised for her great faith – that your sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and your souls washed through his most precious blood, and that you may evermore, dwell in him, and he in us as we eat together as one people. What is your normal mindset as you come up for bread and wine? What can you do to make this a more spiritual and holy moment?

And after we have received the bread and wine we often say, 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.' A prayer written by Prof. David Frost in 1980 – with its prodigal son imagery^a, a reminder that living comes after dying, and prayer for an outward focused life arising out of what we have just done, it has such confidence in God and inspiring hope for the future that it's hard to take this prayer to heart and not be lifted up ready to leave church and go and LIVE! It could almost be an ending on its own, with a quick 'see you next week' to go, but there's one more chapter.

For discussion

There's enough questions in the text this week don't you think?

^a Luke 15:11-32

Chapter 11 – Dismissal

Just as the service started with something that was more than a simple, Hi everyone, so we end with more than a simple, Bye everyone! There is a separate section all on its own entitled ‘Dismissal’ in the service book which suggests it is something more significant than that otherwise they could have simply tacked it on to the section entitled ‘The Liturgy of the Sacrament’.

Although the angels in heaven are worshipping constantly, and although Paul urges us to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5.17 – almost the shortest verse in the bible!), when it comes to gathering together there is a set time when we begin, and we do not simply drift away when we’ve had enough any more than you would simply drift out of your friend’s house after a meal without having some sort of goodbye ceremony ranging from walking with you to the front door, to handshakes and invitations to come again and walking you out to your car and waving you off. When we leave Communion we do not drift off but are sent out, as a people of God with a strength and a purpose. The words at the end of the Latin ceremony for centuries were, Ite, missa est – which means, Go, it is (the) dismissal – missa is where the word Mass comes from as well as dismissal. Some see in it also a reference to mission – Go, you have a mission! Although this is probably fanciful as a translation, it is within the purpose of this sending out command. It is not the purpose of a church service or building to simply be a refuge from a world you cannot face, but rather a place that, on a bad day, you gain the strength and perspective to face it. On a good day when you come not for refuge but to rejoice and give thanks, it is intended that after having expressed it to God you go out into the world to share it. At the end of the service you don’t just leave, you are sent out!

First there is a final prayer of blessing. The most common words we use, reflecting on Philippians 4.7^a, have been used here since the 4th century, ‘The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.’ The presider, celebrant, head of the house, is sending you out with a reminder of the true head of the house and the peace that comes from him that will guard you, or keep you in the right way, amidst all the troubles you are now going out to face. There can be something of the feel of the Levitical priestly blessing (Numbers 6.23-27^b) here, where we ‘put God’s name’ on God’s people. It is a reassurance that God and you are on the same side as you return to face life (not that you left it). Having then given you that blessing and reminded you of who’s name you carry, you then show you know what he means by replying to the instruction, ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord’, with, ‘In the name of Christ’ – which means you understand that you can go in peace because you have, or are under, the name of Christ; or if the instruction is ‘Go in the peace of Christ’, you reply with a humble and grateful smile that this is indeed possible and you know it by saying, ‘thanks be to God’.

^a And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

^b Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, 24 The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. 27 So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

For discussion

Thinking about this blessing in dismissal, think about how you send people home from your house or your office. We come to God's house and expect to be healed, forgiven, taught, strengthened, to receive from him and to receive him. When people come to our homes, they should find forgiveness and a sharing with you and in you that teaches and strengthens shouldn't they? What is the biblical way? Is your house a place of blessing for family, friend and stranger?

In coming to the dismissal I think about how I want to send you away at the end of this study. I hope I have shown you how what we do in our services is a healthy and desirable way to behave when we gather. I have said much of what goes through my head and my heart as I do these things and I hope I have shown how a background appreciation of the bible can enrich your experience as you come to this service of Holy Communion. The hard part is remembering to remember God and the spiritual realm in which we live and gather so we get a God-focused context. The reason Christmas carols sound so sweet is because they come with memories of snow on dark evenings and parents being nice and so on (for me), but really the true sweetness should be God's intended Christmas message. We get side-tracked in regular services too by other memories, other thoughts, but if you are not caught up to heaven, if you are not caught up 'in communion' with God when you come to worship, isn't that a bit sad? It is worth the effort to still your heart and enter God's presence and really listen to the words of liturgy and all that is behind it, and listen to the words and language of the music and take them to heart in a church service.

The only thing I haven't talked about, which I mentioned in the introduction, was the ancient style of clothes I wear as I preside over the service. I find in the country I am writing this especially that my robes fit the purpose better than jeans and open necked shirt, or an Asian Sherwani, or African Boubou/Agbada or Kaftan, or perhaps you would have me like an American preacher wearing a suit and tie? No, I like being mistaken for an Emirati when I swan around the hotels doing wedding blessings, and seeing the staff snap to attention when I appear, and then watching their frames relax as they realise with pleasure, it's the Church father! They are reminded from far away, by the clothes, of their Christian heritage and they expect the love of God and know I will greet them and smile, unlike many a hotel guest who takes them as furniture.

What the robes 'speak' is different in different places, dependent in part on the associations that the individual sees in them. For any special occasion we have special clothes – mayoral chains, academic gowns, court wigs, military uniforms, and so on, and to me they add to the grandeur of the occasion. Businesses use uniforms to 'speak' their brand image. In the UK it would normally be a bit strange to wear church robes in a secular place, but in the context of worship I think it adds something good. With the colours of the seasons and richness of the decoration, the choir, on occasion the decoration of candles, and the ever changing features that we do have in church, my robes remind of a heritage deeper than passing

fashion or of a particular nationality, a heritage in which many centuries of my forebears invite me to discover what it is to know God, to be at peace with him, to worship him and to enjoy him, forever.

Bibliography

The reason I started doing this was because there weren't any books I could find that were bible studies on liturgy, or even house group studies on liturgy and I wanted to write one. Although I've not ended up with quite what I thought I would, what I've done is what I've done and here's the books I used. There will be books that are far better in bookshops in 'Christian' countries I'm sure but in the UAE this is what I had on the shelves:

Common Worship: Main Volume - Services for the Church of England 2000

My Bible ☺

The Tutorial Prayer Book – Charles Neil and J. M. Willoughby – The Harrison Trust 1912

Liturgy and Worship – edited by W. K. Lowther Clarke – SPCK 1932

A New Eusebius (Documents illustrating the history of the church to AD337) – J. Stevenson, revised by W.H.C. Frend – SPCK 1987 – This is a very interesting compilation of documents of the early church

Creeds, Councils and Controversies (Documents illustrating the history of the Church AD337-461) – J. Stevenson, revised by W.H.C. Frend – SPCK 1989 – a companion volume to the one above.

A Companion to the Alternative Service Book – R.C.D Jasper and Paul F. Bradshaw – SPCK 1986

Using Common Worship (A practical guide to the new services) – Mark Beach – Praxis 2000

New Handbook of Pastoral Liturgy – Michael Perham – SPCK 2000

The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction – Eugene Peterson 1989

My college notes from lectures by Revd. Dr. John Fenwick who was a great lecturer on Liturgy.

And useful websites: biblegateway.com, biblehub.com.

Recommended to me:

Understanding Worship – by Anne Horton, Mark Earey, Perron Gay 2001