Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper7—Year B
I Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49
Psalm 9:9-20
II Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

This **sermon is like none other**. It's **a love letter to 8 o'clock—to you, to 8 o'clock congregations everywhere, to the liturgy itself.**

I'll start with the **liturgy**. *Lots of parishes do an early service, but a lot of them don't do Rite I.* They don't much like the **atonement language** in the **eucharistic prayers** with its focus on **sacrifice**, and yes, that is there, but I've never been one for throwing out the baby with the bath water. The **structure of this service is old, old, old** and **captures some of our deepest Anglican intuitions**. And the **language**, oh my, the **language**. **Thee's and thou's**—yes, they're **formal**, and we **don't talk that way anymore**, but sometimes that **formality takes us to a transcendent place.**

I cut my teeth on **Rite I language**, and when I returned to the church as a young adult, it was to an **8:00 Rite I Holy Eucharist**. My home parish was a **morning prayer parish**, and as a child, ***The General Thanksgiving*** was firmly planted in my psyche and in my soul. Phrases like: **"We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory…"** I mean is there any more gorgeous language than that? It just soars.

And when it comes to *The Holy Eucharist: Rite One*…

Where else do we hear ***The Summary of the Law*****: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all they mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."** Right there, we are anchored in LOVE and *that* LOVE is the foundation of everything else.

The Confession of Sin…yes, the old language is pretty stark, and we mostly use the form that is mirrored in Rite II, but daggone, sometimes, **"we** need to **acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness**; sometimes, **we do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them *is* grievous unto us, the burden of them *is* intolerable…"** Sometimes, the stark, pull-no-punches language captures our lived, hard, dark experience. Thank God, we have a place to put the feelings and energy and regret when we have blown it in big, significant ways that horrify us.

We hear the **absolution**, and then, the ***Comfortable Words***. There are several options, but I only ever needed one: **"Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you…"** *Matthew 11:28*. Episcopalians aren't always known for memorizing scripture verses, but that one is written on my heart.

When we move into **The Holy Communion**, I like that we understand that **"it is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks, unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God."** Duty has a bad rap these days, but duty can be good and holy.

And as we prepare to say the **Sanctus** together, we remember that we do so **"with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven."** We are always swimming with the saints, *always*.

In **Eucharistic Prayer I**, we get all that **sacrificial language**, and there is the turn of the phrase that, depending on how well my mouth is working at 8:00, can really trip me up: **"rendering unto thee most hearty thanks for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same."** Try saying that really fast three times in a row at 8:00. No, you've **got to slow it down, and that is a good thing**.

Atonement theology aside, **Prayer I** also gives us this: **"And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee."** We offer everything, all that we are, all of it. It's just beautiful.

Eucharistic Prayer II also has us **"offering and presenting unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies"** and then moves us into the perfect blending of our *Catholic* and *Protestant* roots. We pray: **"Grant, we beseech thee, that all who partake of this Holy Communion may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, and be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction; and also that we and all they whole Church may be made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him…"**

"Body and Blood," so tangible, real, visceral, so *Catholic* and **"grace and heavenly benediction,"** so *Protestant*. **"Outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace**"—the very best of **sacramental theology**, the via media, the middle way that wove us through the **Reformation** taking what was **good and holy and true** and **letting it also evolve with new**, and sometimes **corrective**, **understandings**. So much gratitude to our **theological weavers from the 1500's**—no small thing when ***people died for one belief*** *or* ***the other***. It's all right there—**Catholic** *and* **Protestant** intuitions **co-existing together**, the wondrous **both/and**.

In **Lent**, we then pray the **Prayer of Humble Access**; people hate this prayer; so many people feel like it has us groveling before God, but have we lost all sense of the magnitude of what we are daring to do when we approach this **Table**? Maybe it's good that **"we do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but rather in thy manifold and great mercies."** Maybe it's healing not to have to puff up and assert our worthiness, but to know that *that's* not even a criteria.

That image of **"not being worthy to gather up the crumbs under thy Table"** takes us right to the **Syrophoenician woman** who **challenged Jesus** when he **wouldn't heal her child**, **telling her** that it **wasn't right to give the food meant for the children to the dogs,** and **her countering**, **"But even the dogs eat the crumbs under the table."** Ooooo, maybe there is some **hidden boldness** lurking here.

But in the end, it **isn't now**, *and* ***never was***, **about *our* worthiness**, but **is**, *and* ***always was***, **about *God's mercy***. And at the end of that prayer, we pray: **"Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us."**

Wow. There it is. **We take Jesus, literally into our being**, **drink him into our being**, and **understand** that **he** *and* **we are inseparable**, are **one**—**mutual indwelling, complete union, changing us from the inside out at the cellular level**. This prayer gives us this **clearest articulation of this mind-blowing truth and reality** that **we experience when we come to this Table and partake of this meal**. Wow.

We come to the **final Prayer of Thanksgiving**, and we get the language of **"holy mysteries." We "most heartily thank thee" for receiving them and "being fed with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son," and we "give thanks that we are very members incorporate of the**

mystical body of thy Son." **"We humbly beseech there, O heavenly Father, to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in…"** The **mystical body**…this **great, big, vast mystical reality envelopes us**, and **we understand** that **our thanksgiving** has to **play out in our lived lives, good works, walking in the way**.

And the **Final Blessing**…I can still remember the priest I grew up with, **Mr. Davenport**, **standing before our congregation every Sunday**: **"The peace of God, which passeth 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 Ghost, be amongst you, and remain with you always. *Amen*."** I always feel his presence in my hand as I raise it to bless you, *always*. ***Time and space disappear, that's what happens in this holy liturgy in this holy place.***

So much is **in this liturgy**, so **powerful**, so **mystical**, so **holy**, so **unbelievably beautiful**, and **we have shared it together for over 20 years**. **Some who shared this hour with us do so now from the company of heaven**—*Art, Becky, Wayne, BK, Lois, Ann, Annette, Hal, Jeremy, Randy, others...*

You know, **8 o'clock congregations are special**. All priests know that a nuclear bomb could go off, and **8 o'clockers would still crawl out the next morning to come to the early service**. You are **steadfast**, **so, so steadfast**. There is **a discipline to coming at 8:00 that is holy**. Those of us who come here, we **love the quiet** and **the song of the birds**. We love the **song of the quiet *between* the parts of liturgy**. **There is space here; time to contemplate**. We **move slow**; we **take our time**, and then, our tank **FULL**, we **move out into the world to greet the rest of the day**.

I love the later service, but **there is a part of my soul that can *only* worship here**. **I love you all for that.** So, **thank you**, for **letting my soul rest here with you**, **Sunday in and Sunday out, for 20+ years**, for **allowing me to touch the sheer beauty of our Anglican tradition**, for the **chance to remember**, ***every* week**, that **sometimes the old words say it best** *and* for **not ceding away the poetry for the sake of the new**. **You live in my heart, dear 8 o'clockers, you live in my heart in a very, very special place, and *you always will***. Amen.

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June 23, 2024