

This is the last of my 4 sermons on thankfulness.

The first 3 were on God, our Creator;

God, our Redeemer; and God, our Sanctifier.

Today is about the Church.

Not Holy Trinity Parish specifically,

and not the entire Church Catholic,

but Anglican Christianity, our portion of the Body of Christ

with roots going back to 3rd century England

and who today includes around 100 million people

across the globe.

So today, a list!

The Top 7 Things I Am Thankful for in the Anglican Church!

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Number 1 - we'll start with something super obvious.

I am so thankful for the Prayer Book.

When I was new to this church I loved the prayer book for its history.

I loved that there were prayers in here
people have prayed for centuries.

Then I became a priest and I loved it for its reliability,

loved that we have a way of praying and worshipping
that can be counted on, a way has stood the test of time.

And now that I'm getting older I love it for its repetition.

I'm comforted by praying the same prayers day after day, week after week.

On sabbatical I visited 12 churches, all of them in some way Anglican.

And the more familiar each service was,
the more I could pray instead of watch.

I knew when to reach outside myself to rejoice in God's presence

and when to turn inward to pray and look at my life.

I don't have to think about it. I can just do it.

So I thank God for this prayer book,

for how it guides my prayers and my worship.

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Number 2 - Church Unity!

For my first 20 years in the Episcopal Church,
my faith was too often about being different
from the Christianity of my childhood.
“We are not like THOSE Christians.”

Maybe some of that was necessary - maybe -
but there was a lot of arrogance behind it, too.

So for the next 15 years I went back and rediscovered the gifts
I had been given by the Church that raised me,
from the people who first loved me and taught me about Jesus.

Now, as I approach 40 years in this part of Christ's Church,
I find myself appreciating Anglicanism in a new way.

Now, instead of it being in opposition to something,
I find I can just love us for what we are.

And the funny thing is, this more expansive way of seeing the Church
was always part of Anglican Christianity.

At our best, our focus is not on opposition to other parts of the Church,
but on unity.

We are to work towards the day when the entire Church
will truly be one body.

Bp. Wright is way ahead of me on this.

When he receives people into the Episcopal Church
he goes out of his way to reject the idea
that we are better than the church they came from.
Instead, he welcomes you to bring the gifts of your past
into this piece of the whole.

Now if you're more of a concrete thinker,
the best way to understand our commitment to church unity
is to turn to page 876 of the prayer book,
and read a beautiful document called
the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

But if you're more a poet,
let me read something from George Ramsey,
a former Abp. of Canterbury.

"The Anglican Church," he said, "points...through its own history
to something of which it is a fragment.
Our credentials are our incompleteness...."

"We are clumsy and untidy.
We baffle neatness and logic
for we are sent not to commend ourself
as the best type of Christianity
but by our brokenness to point to the universal church
wherein all have died."¹

That's a lot... but what I'm really saying is that I'm thankful
for a Church that helps me move away from separatism and arrogance
and towards unity and humility.

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¹ From The Living Church Podcast: Theology and the Episcopal Church with Kelli Joyce and Scott MacDougall, Sep 10, 2026
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/theology-and-the-episcopal-church-with-kelli/id1268805196?i=1000788815991&r=1545.52>.

I changed the quote from 3rd person to 1st person plural for effect. Preacher's privilege.

For Number 3, let me push my luck with these big concepts,
and say I'm thankful that Anglican Christianity
doesn't set itself in opposition to the world,
but that instead we see God's presence everywhere.

But Anglicans tend to see God's hand everywhere,
in the sacred AND the earthly,
so we tend to be more open to all the blessings of earthly life -
to medicine and psychology and technology and evolution.

We tend to be curious instead of skeptical of new developments
in science and culture and human behavior,
in music and arts and politics.

And sometimes we get it wrong.
Sometimes the new, shiny thing leads us astray.
But I love that we continue to look for God's presence
everywhere in the world.

When I was a teenager there was a push
to have Christian alternatives to the culture.
My "favorite" were the Christian heavy metal bands -
anybody remember Petra?

I get that impulse, but Anglicans never really embraced it.
We tend to look for what God is up to out in the world,
including on the radio.

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Number 4 is the very first thing that attracted me to the Episcopal Church
way back in college: the good ol' Via Media - the Middle Way.

I learned later that the middle way is not actually
a theology or doctrine of the church.

Instead, it's...a temperament. A historical preference.

You can trace it back to the New Testament when the disciples
found a way for Jews and Gentiles to be together in the Church,
or to the 3rd century when the Celtic Christians
made peace with the Roman Church,
or to Queen Elizabeth in the 16th century
or John Henry Newman in the 19th century
or to our own Episcopal Church in the 20th century....

But wherever you see us our stance has usually been
to try and find a way forward together
rather than to go our separate ways.

So I give thanks for our messy, expansive, hopeful church,
as we keep trying and sometimes even succeeding
in finding a way forward together.

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Okay, here's a break from the conceptual stuff.

Number 5 - I'm thankful for George Herbert!

It's a cliché, but I don't care. I'm thankful for George Herbert.

I'm thankful for a priest who turned down career advancement
to stay in a tiny parish and write beautiful poetry that glorified God
until he died much too young.

Love bade me welcome:
yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love,
observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me,
sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

I'm thankful for George Herbert.

I'm thankful our church embraces beauty as a way to glorify God.

Beautiful words, music, and architecture,
beautiful vestments, art, food, and forests.

I'm thankful for the beauty of cathedrals
and just as thankful for a humble altar in a poor parish in Haiti
where someone brought a simple bouquet of flowers.

I'm thankful for Evensong and Thomas Tallis
and the Anglican Choral Tradition,
no matter how humbly or how perfectly it's offered.

I'm thankful because creating beauty is partnering with God,
and we belong to a Church who understands that.

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Okay, two more.

Number 6 - I'm thankful for how Anglicans study the Bible.

We joke that we don't know the Bible

and sadly, there's some truth in that.

But another truth is that we have a long, faithful,
vital tradition of Biblical scholarship.

I'm thankful for Richard Hooker defending scripture
against fundamentalism.

I'm thankful for the King James Bible,
and 250 years later for a group of priests in Cambridge
who created the definitive edition of the Greek New Testament.

I'm thankful for how so much of our prayer book comes from the Bible,
and for how much scripture we read in morning prayer
and on Sunday mornings.

Here's something you might not know about our Church.

Whenever someone is ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop,
we have to both say and sign our names to this vow:

"I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures
of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God,
and to contain all things necessary to salvation."

I'm thankful for that vow,
just like I'm thankful for how Anglicans engage with scripture,
from men AND WOMEN being ordained,
to scholars at Cambridge
to little Wednesday Bible studies all over the world.

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Okay, number 7, the last one, and to be honest,
this is the one I'm MOST thankful for,
because it's the one that has shaped my faith the most.

What has formed my faith in this Church more than anything else,
is the Hymnal 1982.

I sometimes tell people that the reason I write my sermons
is that I don't actually know what I think until I write it down.

I think it's also true that I don't know what I believe until I sing it,
over and over and over.

My faith in God has been shaped not by listening to,
but by singing the music of the Hymnal 1982.

There are other hymnals, of course.
Wonderful hymnals and okay hymnals.
Some churches even sing without hymnals.

We have Voices Found and Wonder, Love, & Praise - they're okay hymnals.

I love Lift Every Voice and Sing,
especially because it's an African-American gospel hymnal
but also basically the same hymnal I grew up with
in my all-white Baptist Church - Look at God!

But this hymnal - this is the one that taught me the faith of this Church.

Here is where I learned to sing Glorias and Canticles and Kyries.

Where I learned to sing “Oh Sacred Head Sore Wounded” on Palm Sunday,
“Pange Lingua” on Maundy Thursday,
and “Ah, Holy Jesus” on Good Friday.

To sing “O come, O come Emmanuel” in Advent,
“Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord” at Easter,
and “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” on Trinity Sunday.

“We know that Christ is raised and dies no more” at baptisms,
“I sing a song of the saints of God” at funerals,
“Spirit of the Living God” at Preschool Chapel,
and whenever Will knows I need a pick-me-up,
“King of Glory, King of Peace” (words by George Herbert).

This hymnal - like the prayer book and the Bible -
like our work for Christian unity and our seeking of the Middle Way -
like our love of beauty
and our looking for God’s presence out in the world -
these are all wonderful gifts from God
that have blessed me for almost 40 years.

So I give thanks to God for this, the Anglican Church,
our beautiful, flawed, faithful, messy branch of the Body of Christ,
and I WILL bless the Lord at all times,
his praise shall EVER be in my mouth.

Amen.