

Q: What does it mean to be Anglican*?

Answer Part II: Common Prayer.

**This is the focus question for Synod (this decision-making body of the wider Anglican church) which meets this November, so I am using the Question of the Week for the coming weeks to examine different aspects of how we might answer.*

To be Anglican is to be a follower of Christ. Last week's Answer began with there. But to be Anglican is also to be part of a particular expression, culture, history of following Christ. Common Prayer has played a huge part in that expression.

For many generations "Common Prayer" meant something very specific. It meant that our Anglican worship was formed around the prayers and liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer, a prayer resource created out of the English Reformation, crafted into language of poetry and grace by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, and used –with only minor revisions – throughout our Anglican history (first published 1549) following the split from Rome and the translation of the worship services into the vernacular (rather than the Latin which had been used previously). I can echo the sentiments of many long-time Anglicans in noting the way in which these BCP prayers seemed to become part of the fabric of, not just our memories, but our very bones. I can go for years without participating in an Anglican BCP service, and yet the second that I hear those old prayers again, I am instantly immersed in their familiarity and warmth. It was with considerable difficulty and consternation that the new prayer book, the Book of Alternative Services, was introduced into usage in Canada in 1985. For many, it wasn't just that change was difficult, it was that it felt like *what makes us Anglicans* was at stake.

Since then, most parts of the Anglican communion have introduced revisions, new prayer books, and alternative services. Whereas at one time, one could be assured when walking into an Anglican worship service, in Canada, in New Zealand, in Nigeria, of exactly what one would find as the liturgical source, now the possibilities have been blown wide open.

And yet, Anglicanism still defines itself as grounded in Common Prayer. Just because it is no longer typical to use the BCP doesn't mean that this changes. In fact, Thomas Cranmer when creating the Book of Common Prayer, intended that this first English prayer book would continue to evolve along with the normal evolutions of the people's language.

Rather, our understanding of common prayer has expanded. Common Prayer is about:

-Shape: our worship follows a standard pattern and order, and this pattern and order is not self-created, but links us to the earliest followers of Christ, as well as to Christians around the globe and from a variety of Christian denominations. The shape of our worship is catholic (not Roman Catholic, but small 'c' catholic meaning 'universal')

-Authority: The words of our worship are shared and are created by means of collaboration. Technically this means that Anglican worship should be crafted from texts that have been authorized by the wider Anglican church, by the church's governing bodies.

Perhaps this more modern understanding of Common Prayer is actually truer to the reality of what Anglicanism has always been. Despite sharing a prayer book across the global Anglican

communion, variation between congregations has always existed, and in fact, the wide variety of acceptable expression is something else that has always been recognized in what it means to be Anglican (just look at our three downtown Anglican churches, St. Thomas, St. Barnabas and St. George, each one honouring a particular branch of Anglicanism). Our Common Prayer has never made us all the same, but rather has helped us to remember to look outward – beyond our own individual expression of Christianity, to seek communion and authority in a more global, more timeless, body.