



Session 3: Heroic Living for Abundant Life

Putting who we are called to be before who we are comfortable being. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” John 10:10

It occurred to me that if we are going to maintain our unique character as Anglicans among the family of Christian Churches, we do so in two ways. First, by knowing who it is that we are and where we have come from. I hope that the previous two sessions have pointed in that direction. Secondly, by acknowledging how Anglicans behave in their relationship with the world around them which moves the church and society into the future. This is a more contemporary aspect of who we are, and part of that “seat of experience” that we picked up from Hooker.

I have been blessed in discovering, adopting, growing into, and living in the Canadian Anglican experience. Though there are similarities we are very different in so many ways from Anglicans in other national bodies. We are very different for example from the current expression of the Church of England in terms of its day to day life and the way it manages that life.

So, as much as we can identify ourselves by our common heritage with all other Anglicans around the world, we can also identify ourselves as unique by our Canadian reality. That reality has been guided by some impressive people. They have been impressive for a variety of reasons. Some have been deeply spiritual, some theological, some have shaken the church, -waking some and frightening others,- and some have simply been strong enough to mark time as the church healed and gained strength.

Either because of or in spite of this variety of prophets, priests and administrators the last century in Canada has been one of astounding change. Yes, I said that word that Anglicans so greatly fear – change. But, I will dare to say that it isn't change at all. It's simply consistent with being the Church that is becoming what God calls us to be.

Cranmer pointed in this direction in Article 12:

“Albeit that good works..... are... pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”

Michael Welker, of Princeton Theological Seminary, writing in *Theology Today*, had this to say:

“The one upon whom Yahweh’s spirit rests is described as one who executes justice and righteousness in favour of the lowly and the poor, and who precisely in that manner acquires great power, who precisely in that manner builds strong loyal attachments.”

Whether within the church or with those outside the Anglican Church of Canada, we have built strong and loyal attachments. If we want to stand distinguished among the churches in Canada, we can rejoice in the fact that we have had a lively faith that has produced good works, and that by the fruits of those works we are known. We are known for being a church that does not simply trot along in comfortable isolation. We stick our noses into things because we strive to execute justice and righteousness in favour of the lowly and the poor.

Sticking our noses into things doesn’t change us, but it changes how we speak clearly into our time, and what symbols we use, and how we handle the issues of our day using scripture, tradition, reason and experience, not as things that necessarily preserve the past, but as things that further the Reign of God.

Now many will see the things I’m talking about as internal, but I don’t. I don’t see them as issues internal to the church at all. I think

that they are very much a part of our being able to speak into the situations and conditions of others who are external to the church. In this way I believe that the Anglican Church in this country has the strong characteristic of affecting social change as an act of evangelism. Not just social change that affects a small number of people, but change that cuts large swaths through society and culture, touching and changing lives that they may have life and have it more abundantly.

We do so, with that unique Anglican discipline and that unique Anglican approach to discerning truth and direction. We are not Puritans and so do not lock ourselves into an unchanging mindset that applies from age to age. We are not Romans, whose historic pattern is to lag behind social change. We are trend setters, we are movers; we are shakers.

That does not mean that we don't have groups and communities that resist change for a variety of reasons, or who hold tenaciously to attitudes whose time is long past. It does mean that the broader church in this country moves through life with a variety of voices, a variety of attitudes, but an over arching ability to encounter and engage contemporary society and speak into it with power and authority.

I look at what has happened in my lifetime, most of which has been captured in Hugh McCullum's "Radical Compassion", a history of Anglicanism in Canada in the 20th Century disguised as a biography of Ted Scott.

John Bothwell in his review of the book points out that *"As the 20th century dawned on Canada it saw a church based on simplistic, white, hierarchical assumptions (that prevailed in society) at that time — such as viewing native Canadians as "savages in need of conversion." And later the insensitivity of civil, and some church, authorities to human suffering at the grass roots during the Great Depression and among Japanese Canadians in World War II.* ¹

Since then, the Anglican Church of Canada has been involved with Apartheid in South Africa, the ordination of women, the modernization of our liturgies, the lifting of restrictions on the re-marriage of divorced persons. We have taken seriously our responsibilities around the Residential Schools Issue and the affect that has had on a whole generation of First Nations' people. We have been active in addressing poverty, homelessness, issues around Health Care, and equality among the many ethnic groups that make

¹ "Great Scott! A great story and important history" – John Bothwell

up our nation. We have been an effective lobby to moving for the redress of wrongs by churches and governments.

In each case issues have brought out radicals at both ends of the spectrum, but we have managed to move through the quagmire to find solid ground on which to step forward.

Remaining Anglican in a diverse community of churches will depend on whether we can reclaim this spirit of involvement with the world and continue to do that as we face new issues that affect not just us, but the wider society in which we exist.

Look at the areas of society into which we have spoken and had a profound effect. Depending on your point of view, or your theological leaning, many, if not most could be seen to have a social justice implication.

- Human rights
- Women's issues and particularly gender equality issues
- Pastoral concern for human inter-personal relationships

And

- We have set a tone in new worship language to support this activity.

At the time of the approval of the B.A.S. the direction in which the Canadian Church was moving was characterized in this way by someone who was not so happy about the changes;

‘The Canadian church has moved from being the Conservative Party at prayer (BCP), to the NDP thinking it can form government (B.A.S.)’ Setting aside the political references, since I don’t want to get into that mine field, it did note through the use of the language of worship a significant change in the outlook of the Canadian Church, one that invited the Church into involvement with contemporary society and gave it a voice of prophecy, and of challenge.

New Zealand captured the this new overt attitude in this century more succinctly in one of it’s Eucharistic Prayers:

*“You empower us to know you in truth
And to fearlessly proclaim your Good News to all people.
Your love fires our hearts;
And in your Spirit
We hunger and thirst for justice in the world.”*

*“Feed us with your life,
Fire us with your love,
Confront us with your justice,”²*

This is not to say that other churches do not take on these issues, or address society effectively. But we Anglicans seem to be “testers of

² A Prayer Book – The Church of New Zealand – Eucharistic Prayer of Creation

barriers” and as a National Church we have called people to the journey of the disciples that John Shelby Spong identifies in *“The Easter Moment”* as the journey from “being cowards to being heroes”.

When you combine this activity with the potential effectiveness of our worship and the foundations we have for being a discerning church, we are set apart in the community of Canadian Churches. In other words, I don’t believe that one characteristic of Anglicanism alone is able to identify us as distinct within the wider community of churches. But all these characteristics together produce the fruit by which we are known.

To be known as Anglican is to be known for heroically stepping into the world, for speaking clearly to that world of a Gospel that transforms all creation and that we have come to know through the fullness of God’s gifts to us revealed in scripture, informed by tradition, discerned through reason and known in experience. It is a heroism that we need to reclaim in a new age.

