

Proper 28B, Saint John's Olney, 18 November 2018
The Reverend Henry P McQueen
1 Samuel 1:4-20; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

S.D.G.

An interesting thing occurred recently at an ecumenical gathering. Over coffee an Episcopal priest was talking with a Roman Catholic priest and a Baptist pastor. The conversation meandered to the topic of authority and who had the ultimate authority in the church.

The Roman Catholic priest said that the ultimate authority in the church was the Pope. What the Pope said or wrote directed all things.

The Baptist preacher said that the ultimate authority was the people of the church; they would discuss matters and vote to decide what was the right thing to do.

The Episcopal priest looked at his colleagues and said, in the Episcopal Church the ultimate authority are the past rectors.

Authority comes in many forms. Today we have a glimpse of how Thomas Cranmer viewed authority. But first, a glimpse of Thomas Cranmer himself.

Cranmer was a leader in the Reformation and served as Archbishop of Canterbury during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I; he served until Queen Mary had him imprisoned, tried for heresy, and burned at the stake; she was Catholic, he was a reformer.

Much of his life and teachings deserves discussion, however, perhaps Cranmer's greatest legacy is in the book rack in front of you; Cranmer was the author of the first two versions of the Book of Common Prayer and his influence continues with the version that is in your pew.

In the preface to the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549 Cranmer wrote "*There was never any thing by wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted*". The corruption that he spoke of was the

demise of the regular reading of Scripture. Worship had, from the earliest of times, been structured around the reading of the whole Bible once each year. Man's own wisdom soon corrupted this practice, something Cranmer was determined to correct.

The purpose of regular reading of the Bible was so that clergy, in Cranmer's words, "*should (by often reading, and meditation of God's word) be stirred up to godliness themselves*", he continued, "*and further, that the people (by daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church) should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion.*"

Cranmer structured the Book of Common Prayer so that through the daily office, feast days, and Sundays, the whole of the Bible would be familiar to those in worship. Important to this understanding was that Latin would no longer be used; he wanted the hearts, spirit, and mind to be effected by the hearing of Scripture and the prayers. To this end the common language, English, would be used for all services.

Cranmer's views challenged the authority of Queen Mary and her Catholic roots so he was ultimately martyred but not before he left us one of the most impactful of all the collects in the prayer book.

The collect that we heard today was original to Cranmer and highlights his emphasis on Holy Scripture as the true authority and source of wisdom in the Church. Unique to this collect is the opening where God the Father is addressed as "Blessed Lord".

Blessed Lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our savior Jesus Christ.

The ending of this collect in the original form references Colossians and reflects Cranmer's belief that every part of Scripture bears witness in some way to Jesus Christ.

We are to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these holy words. Just as the Word was made flesh, and we are strengthened by receiving the Body of Christ at the Holy Eucharist, so too are we strengthened by digesting the holy word of Scripture.

For many wisdom may be found though a particular news source, the writings of a philosopher, or Google and the internet. For Cranmer authority and wisdom are found solely in Holy Scripture.

Those who embarked on the Bible Challenge in January are approaching the conclusion of their journey as they read the final books of the Hebrew Bible. For some this was one of many journeys that they had taken through Scripture. For others this was the first attempt at reading the Bible. Some have read ahead, others have lagged behind; last January it may have seemed like a daunting task, but every one of those who started this journey has been blessed through the reading of Holy Scripture. Despite the demands of daily life, despite the challenges with finding time to read, everyone has benefited from this reading of the Bible.

For the past 10 years, I have relied upon and read the same Bible. Next year, I will pick up a different version, a translation that is new to me, and I will read it again. I hope that I won't be alone, and that others will be reading it too.

We are challenged, comforted, and some times confused with the reading of Scripture. Regardless, each time we delve into the treasures found in Scripture we find the wisdom to see God in the world.

The disciples want to know when the birth of the kingdom of God will come, they want to know what the signs are. Most of us have been witness to people claiming to have seen the signs; it is within the memories of most here that the year 2000 would mark the end of the world. There have been numerous such claims both before and after the year 2000; June 2019 is the next claimed end time.

Jesus knows that times will be troubling, birth-pangs will make their mark, and we will ultimately recognize the kingdom of God; but not in a way that we expect. In Luke Jesus says *"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."* Lk 17:20

"God's kingdom is already among you." We find the wisdom to see the kingdom through Scripture as we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these holy words.

I have shared with some of you the experience I had with a professor who was encouraging us to do something that would be considered sacrilegious by many; he wanted us to underline and write notes in our Bible. He wanted us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what was on those pages. He held up his Bible and said that there is nothing special about this book, it is the message of the book that is special. And with that he threw the Bible across the room and into a trash can. Jaws dropped. He looked at us and said, don't worship a book, that is idolatry; worship God and find God through the words of Scripture. Find the kingdom that is already among us through Scripture.

He then retrieved the book from the trash can and slyly commented, it wasn't the Bible, it was just a book, even he would not throw a Bible into the trash. His theatrics made a point.

The Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us, the word of God is found within holy Scripture. The wisdom to find the kingdom of God that is already among us is there for our benefit when we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's holy word.

Amen,