

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 23B, Sept 6, 2015
James 2:1-17**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

It has been quite a week in international affairs. Another moment has come when the world's heartstrings are pulled and conscience awakened, this time by a picture of one small boy who died a tragic death. For several days now, my Facebook newsfeed has been full of religious, political and social commentary about the refugee crisis in the Middle East, Europe and indeed, everywhere. The story has been so overwhelming that I wondered if I should shift away from what I'd been thinking about since last Sunday. I have decided to stick with my original plan because, to be honest, there are so many voices speaking to the plight of the refugees, I'm not sure I have much to add. There is clearly a need for compassion to be translated into political will and the connection to our faith seems obvious. Any one of us could make a connection to any of our readings this morning. Action is needed, not more words, and so for now, we're going to reflect on one aspect of how we respond as a worshipping community... that is, how we worship.

The closing Eucharist for my week at Sorrento in July was led by The Rev. Travis Enright, one of the presenters in my course, a member of the Liturgy Task Force and a priest in Edmonton. It was held at their outdoor chapel where, instead of using the large stone altar, Travis created a smaller one, low to the ground, in the middle of the space. Travis is a First Nations man who brings that identity into his ministry and so the Prayers of the People had us turn to pray to the 4 directions, the altar was decorated with feathers and for communion we had cranberries along with the bread. It was beautiful and meaningful. Afterwards when I was talking with Travis, he reflected some of the course discussion about the Eucharist service and commented: "you see... It's not really different. I didn't change anything." I laughed because... he had changed everything! And I laughed because it was so good to hear another priest say something I would say, reflecting how we both approach and experience liturgy: Change everything, but do nothing different.

I'm sure many of you here have worshipped in an Anglican Church somewhere else in the world. It is quite an incredible experience of solidarity and unity, and of being part of something so much larger than ourselves. Oftentimes, however, it is quite different... with different languages and different local customs. I loved worshipping in the Anglican cathedral in Havana, Cuba because even though I didn't know any of the Spanish, I more or less knew what prayers were being said and I could follow along. I loved worshipping in the cathedral in Freetown, Sierra Leone but was a bit thrown when an offering plate was passed 3 separate times to address different needs. It was a bit embarrassing to run out of cash in my not-knowing! I also loved worshipping in a small church in rural Sierra Leone where we could hardly hear because of the noise of the generator but I could follow because the service was BCP-like with old-style English, though with a little praise music in a local language thrown in... it was pretty terrible, but in all the right ways because I could have been in Stettler or Drumheller... I loved it and knew that these were my people. And so it goes. Anglican worship around the world has many

differences... different languages and different particular customs and yet nothing is changed from the worship with which we are all familiar.

In Seattle, Washington a priest named Karen Ward planted an Episcopal (or Anglican)/Lutheran mission about 15 years ago in the trendy, artsy community of Fremont in Seattle. "The Church of the Apostle's" or COTA began as and in a tea shop until they eventually re-purposed a closed Lutheran church into Fremont Abbey. The Abbey became home to COTA along with the Fremont Abbey Arts Centre which they also started.

I first worshipped at COTA roughly 10 years ago and had the most incredible experience. The open space had old couches and chairs - kind of an "early garage sale" style... and the projection system had a hitch that delayed the start of worship. I felt old since the gathering community was mostly 20-somethings and I was beyond that! After the homily, there was time to reflect in silence or by lighting a candle near an icon, or in conversation near the entrance... you could draw or paint using one of the easels set up around the room or you could write a prayer at the prayer station. Karen wasn't there that day, but when we re-gathered, the young man who presided at the Eucharist did an extempore Eucharistic prayer that was brilliant. The whole service had been in contemporary and inclusive language but it was when we ended by singing "Be Thou My Vision" complete with its traditional, non-inclusive lyrics, that I knew I was home. Everything about the service was changed but there was an underlying and completely recognizable structure and spirit that made it familiar and comfortable and enlivening. I remember thinking at the time that it was just about perfect... a perfectly faithful development of traditional Anglican worship. Everything was changed but the only thing that was different was that it connected for me and within me in a unique and powerful way.

The most important thing I learned during the "Old Wine, New Skins" course at Sorrento is that the national Liturgy Task Force is *not* producing a new prayer book. This is not a new fight but rather it is about integrating and deepening our expression of the changes of the past 50-odd years, and it is about finding our identity and unity in a common, underlying structure rather than in specifics. So much about language and style and aesthetics is different across cultures and times that one set of words simply doesn't work well. But the pattern of worship... gathering, proclaiming the word, breaking bread and un-gathering... this is an ancient pattern that can hold even as it flexes and moves. The work of the Liturgy Task Force as it relates to the Eucharistic celebration is in compiling the many resources - resources authorized by the church - currently available, and is creating a new, on-line platform for accessing them. It's being developed by Travis and his team and they're calling it: "The Ordo." It's an online format that breaks the Eucharistic service down into all its component parts... offering explanations of each part - their purpose and theology - and offering options for how to express each one. It's early in its development and I believe our little group in Sorrento were the first people outside the committee to get a look at it. It's brilliant because it's not actually different from what the BAS book did and yet it changes everything. If you turn to page 174 in the BAS, you'll see the a description of the rite with explanations about the order, the ordo, with the purpose of each part and various other details and options.

I'd like us to spend just a few minutes looking at our service today, to notice changes and commonalities... what are the changes and how are we doing nothing different? SO... let's look at the bulletin... what do you see:

Some items to be sure to cover:

- Section titles: Gathering, Word, Eucharist, Dismissal
- “Lay Reader” to “Liturgical Assistant”... also an addition to their role in setting the table is coming...
- singing new Glory!
- creed vs. affirmation of faith...

Changing everything (or something!), while doing nothing different.

“Old Wine, New Skins...” We’re taking 3 weeks in September to delve into it more! Starting NOT this week, but next... likely Sept 14 (Monday) at 7pm and hopefully Wednesday, 10:00am?!? or 1:00pm? Reading available... re: principles of worship... article I talked about last week from The Rev. Dr. Richard Leggett and a chapter from the book “Worship Wars” with characteristics of vital and faithful worship. My hope is for these 2 teams to then work on developing a liturgy for a particular Sunday and perhaps themes and direction after that...

Finally, the word “liturgy” comes from the Greek “leitourgia,” meaning “the work of the people.” We want our liturgy to reflect the beliefs and spirit and concerns and needs of the people - of US, here and now - in a vital and faithful way. [Given that, for instance, how could our worship focus on the refugee crisis right now?] James wrote to us today: “faith without works is dead...” Our “work” of liturgy - of prayer and praise and worship - matters to our faith and so may we engage with it creatively and prayerfully such that through it, we may grow in our knowledge and love of God and neighbour.