

MARS HILL GRADUATE SCHOOL

Embodying Anglican Theology:

Applying the Missional Impulse of the Book of Common Prayer to an Urban Context

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) will be used as a launching pad for how we can reshape the instrumental and sacramental ways of our faith communities in a manner that will appeal to our postmodern times and urban centers where world views are often varied and at odds. Two important texts on ecclesiology will often be referenced to help us navigate the complex waters of pluralism, postmodernism, their relationship with Christianity, and why the sacraments matter: Leslie Newbigen's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* and N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope*. Through these compelling texts we will be able to characterize the church as a body formed by the calling and sending of God, unifying instrumental (i.e. conversion oriented with a high view of Scripture) and sacramental (in the BCP context Eucharist and baptism) approaches to faith while reflecting the redemptive reign of Christ in practice and witness. The ancient wisdom of the BCP will also be a central text: bringing together missional impulses, Anglican liturgy, and the Sacraments in a way that cares for the marginalized, results in reconciling ministry, and offers hope to our postmodern urban centers.

This paper will be divided up into four parts:

I.) A Common Book in Uncommon Times:

Exploring how the BCP can bring together contrasting (and sometimes antagonistic) segments of the body of Christ in a pluralistic urban context through its history of adaption while retaining its orthodox faith. This section will also seek a more integrated approach to Christian faith that is free to proclaim an evangelical faith while serving the needs of the world.

II.) Sacramental Faith: Community Embodied

The liturgical elements of the BCP promote a faith that is rooted in physicality and affirms God's good creation. This section explores the communal aspects of the BCP as well, with the call to care and nurture one another's faith.

III.) Baptism-A New Way of Life that Calls for Justice

The BCP's baptismal liturgy promotes justice through a call to repentance and by its renunciation of evil. The outworking of our baptismal vows acknowledges the reality of Christ's resurrection and victory over evil powers and principalities. Christ's resurrecting power is explored in urban contexts that continue to struggle with racism and injustice.

IV.) Eucharist-Reconciliation through Sacrifice

In our common humanity and brokenness we come before the table. We are reconciled to God through Christ's body broken and His blood shed. It's our call as the redeemed to leave the table and be a reconciling presence in the world by following Christ's sacrificial example

Introduction

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society . . . it will be through local congregations renouncing an introverted concern for their own life, and recognizing that they exist for the sake of those who are not yet members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace.¹

-Anglican Bishop Lesslie Newbigen, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

“They are not like us. Our worship needs to be authentic and that simply means that some people are going to feel left out.” These words came from my pastor at a church that ironically was called “The Bridge”. Our church was a new plant that set out to be a diverse congregation that deeply cared for our community. Our efforts were sincere enough, but often missed the mark due to an incomplete idea of what that entailed. For many at our mostly white, youthful, and affluent congregation, emphasizing diversity simply meant serving and meeting the many needs in and around our community, and not necessarily incorporating them into the lifeblood of our church. At the time, my own understanding of holistic ministry and worship was not fully developed and consisted of trying to do “some good in the hood”, while taking the next step by attempting to connect the diverse people of the neighborhood with our Sunday morning worship service. It made little sense to me that we would serve our surrounding community during the week, yet not integrate them into the public worship of our church on Sunday. Understanding the value of reaching out to our diverse friends in the community as equals and partners with invaluable resources, talents, and funds, was sorely lacking.

To this day I have a desire to see urban and diverse people engaged with the mission of the church. Currently I am in the middle of attempting to plant a diverse and holistic Anglican congregation in the South Seattle area, the most diverse area of our city. I've learned a lot along the way, but nothing more valuable than the understanding that our Sunday morning worship and

¹ Lesslie Newbigen, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 233.

liturgy needs to be something with the grit and theological impulse to send us out into mission the rest of the week. In other words, we bring our sacramental ways and worship into the community, as oppose to the spectator approach. This change in direction will help guard against our worship not being contextualized, while still affirming Anglican theology and tradition. The Book of Common Prayer contains the liturgy that we, as Anglicans, use for our worship. Instead of adhering to its holistic emphasis, it has often been reduced to a cold ritual that acts as a barrier to those who are diverse in our urban centers.

The statistics back this premise up. Recently the Barna polling group discovered that mainline congregations (which consists of Episcopalians- one of the major American branches of Anglicanism) has struggled attracting minorities. Our congregations especially struggle in reaching Hispanics and Asians. While Hispanics make up 16% of the US population, they are only 6% of the mainline population. Asians represent 4% of the American public, but only half that proportion among mainline congregants.² My belief is that, like my “Bridge church” experience, much of the Anglican faith in North America has created a dichotomy between what (and who) it engages on Sunday and what it practices the rest of the week. The BCP, instead of bringing people together in mission and service, has simply become “our way” of doing things at public worship on Sundays, an initiation rite into a club instead of an invitation to a new way of living. Sadly, in my fifteen years of experience working on various pastoral staffs at mainline churches, it has been my experience that mission has not been viewed as something we do and are, as much as something we support with our finances. There has been little effort made to engage people with the sacraments and their meaning outside of Sunday morning worship.

²George Barna, “Report Examines the State of Mainline Churches” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/17-leadership/323-report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches>

I currently find myself immersed in an increasingly pluralistic and diverse culture that is largely unfamiliar with the theological terms and practices of the BCP, as sacred as they are to me. It is vital that I go about translating the richness and depth of the BCP to help people understand it's liturgy, so that they, in turn, can become eager to receive it into their hearts and live sacramentally. It's my belief that this translation is more apt to happen in the normal flow of our lives, as the power of the sacraments are expressed in how we go about living.

What if the inherent theology of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, as well as other elements of the liturgy described in the Book of Common Prayer, became the foundation for all we are as we interact with our world? What if this prayer book that was once used to bring together disparate and disjointed faith traditions could once again be used to unite people of faith in our pluralistic urban centers? My main argument is that we do just that: inspire Anglican congregations to begin to live out the missional impulse that is inherent in the BCP's liturgy so that we can become united in reaching people in urban and diverse contexts and in so doing, not only become relevant to our post modern world, but engaging and attractive.

I.) A Common Book in Uncommon Times

United by Faith

The ongoing engagement of the gospel with the cultures of the world means that the work of theology is never completed. It results in an ongoing and irreducible plurality that is reflective of the missional nature of the Christian community to take the good news of the love of God proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth and embody it among all peoples and situations for the good of the world.³

-John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness*

It is only by being faithful participants in a supranational, multicultural family of churches that we can find the resources to be at the same time faithful sustainers and cherishers of our

³ John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 29.

respective cultures and also faithful critics of them. The gospel endorses an immensely wide diversity among human cultures, but it does not endorse a total relativism.⁴

-Lesslie Newbigen, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

Here's the big question at hand: Can anything be considered "common" in the midst of the great diversity that we find in our urban centers? In the west, people are moving into big, urban city centers like never before. We are becoming more diverse and more pluralistic by the moment. A nonchalant embrace of tolerance will do for superficial contact of different ethnicities and world views, but it will not suffice for meaningful and continual interactions. The two quotes above display the importance of engagement with theology and our culture, with Franke's quote seeming to emphasize the importance of plurality and adaptability in matters of theology while Newbigen's quote emphasizes the importance of avoiding a total relativism. Taken to the extreme, either position can lead to a paralysis in mission by either under or over emphasizing Orthodox faith. How this usually plays out is through acquiescence towards aspects of our culture that are odds with Orthodox faith or, on the other hand, a defensive or anti-culture posture. Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright describes how this dynamic comes to be in his book *Surprised by Hope*: "...kingdom theology has been used to rule out or marginalize many aspects of Orthodox Christian faith- precipitating among some would be orthodox Christians a reaction against any social or political dimension to the gospel and against kingdom language altogether."⁵

Unity in Diversity

The BCP was birthed during a time of tension in the church and is ideally suited to become

⁴ Newbigen, 197.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 203.

a unifying force amidst the tensions in the modern church described above. The very first BCP came about in 1549 when Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VII and Edward VI, led the process of creating a new collection of liturgies to be used in the newly created Church of England. He brought together a simplified form of the Roman Catholic rites, liturgies from the Eastern Christian churches, as well as new approaches introduced by the Protestant Reformers. During that period the BCP was significantly revised to help restore unity among those of Catholic and those of Protestant convictions.⁶ In all of this the BCP displayed the ingenuity and adaption that Franke's quote calls for, while still retaining an Orthodox faith that is centered on Christ and classical Christianity that seems to be Newbigen's concern. To this day, the BCP still retains its original openness towards revision and fluidity. In its preface we find these words:

(the BCP) by common consent and authority, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended, or otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people, according to the various exigency of times and occasions. (BCP, pg 9)

As we listen to our culture and other cultures, the BCP, although fluid in the particulars, still helps us to retain our sense of a shared commitment to the gospel story. Christ's unique power to save that is present in the BCP's theology of the Eucharist and baptism must not be de-emphasized by the pluralistic bent of our postmodern society, or as Bishop Wright puts it, we may end up with "a kingdom theology that is a shallow corporate version of faddish self-help moralism"⁷. As Christians we must remember that the gospel will often be offensive (and sometimes divisive) to the culture at large. It is our responsibility as ambassadors of Christ to make sure that it's our embodied Christian commitment that's offensive- not a one-sided,

⁶ David A. Desilva, *Sacramental Life*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 14.

⁷ Wright, 203.

culture-demeaning and guilt-laden ‘gospel’ presentation. Newbigen acknowledges the tensions inherent with truth claims in a pluralistic world:

Christianity is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ. As a human race we are on a journey and we need to know the road. It is not true that all roads lead to the top of the same mountain. There are roads which lead over the precipice. In Christ we have been shown the road. We cannot treat that knowledge as a private matter for ourselves. It concerns the whole human family.⁸

Newbigen wisely states that our attempts at evangelism shouldn’t be about who are going to be saved, instead, evangelism can be about “seeking faithfully both to tell the story and- as part of a Christian congregation- so conduct her life as to embody the truth of the story.”⁹ Again, the BCP’s liturgy and sacramental emphasis is perfectly suited for this because the liturgy is written to not merely be an intellectual exercise, but to be physically manifested in kneeling, crossing ourselves, baptism, eating and drinking, and in sacrificial and missional living. When the BCP exhorts us “to do the work God has given us to do, to love and serve God as faithful witnesses” (BCP, pg 366), it is not a suggestion nor strategy for church growth, but a commitment to share Christ faithfully in order to impact and transform our culture. This is especially needed in urban cultures, where public expressions of faith have often come across as guilt trips or an attack on culture, as oppose to a redemptive sign and opportunity for hope and renewal. With only one-third (31%) of mainline adults believing that they have a personal responsibility to discuss their faith with people who have different beliefs, the BCP’s and Newbigen’s plea for the public proclamation of Christ needs to be reemphasized and embraced.¹⁰

⁸ Newbigen, 183.

⁹ Ibid, 182.

¹⁰ George Barna, “Report Examines the State of Mainline Churches” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/17-leadership/323-report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches>

United by the Spirit

Still, we should not approach our pluralistic urban centers with a proud, “we are here to save you” mentality, rather it is by engaging our culture, our community, and our world where our biases can be challenged, our selfishness confronted, and where we can learn to more fully embody the Gospel. “We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture.”¹¹ The Spirit’s movement is at the heart of Newbigen’s approach to the Christian faith, and fits in nicely with postmodernism’s communal emphasis. To Newbigen, theology is less about propositions and abstractions and more about interactions with the Holy Spirit and the church:

Human life is both personal and corporate...through the work of the Spirit we are led into an even fuller understanding of life as the Spirit takes of the things of Jesus and shows them to us through the experience of our place and time. Our spiritual experience is not an affair of our own individual subjectivity; it is sustained, nourished, and tested by continual reference to the original witnesses of the revelation and by reference to the continuing experience of those who share with us the allegiance to Jesus.¹²

According to Newbigen, engagement with the Spirit and our spiritual community needs to be central to our hermeneutic. The liturgy of the BCP feeds into this engagement because its nature is participatory. “The power of the liturgy resides in its capacity to converse with the complexity of our lives. The flow and movement provide space for worship, learning, confession, peace, and finally, receiving the power of Christ through the sacrament into our lives.”¹³ When we make our way through daily life we don’t simply observe and learn (which much of modern, public worship seems to propagate). Instead, we speak, we feel, we sense, we taste, we touch. Life cannot be lived very fully in a detached and purely intellectual manner. That said, those

¹¹ Ibid, 144.

¹² Ibid, 164.

¹³ Ian Markham, *Liturgical Life Principles*, (New York, Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 29.

from faith traditions that engage the Book of Common Prayer can often detach their liturgy from their daily lives and approach the liturgy in a purely intellectual manner (even to the point where they reject the plain meaning of the liturgy mostly on intellectual means because of a prior commitment to naturalism.) Merely mouthing the words of the BCP without engagement of the Spirit and a call to “live the liturgy” can become a ritual with little meaning and impact, both in the world and in our own hearts.

Intense engagement with liturgy may seem to fly in the face of more historical critical methods of interpretation that value objectivity above all else (as if engagement and objectivity are mutually exclusive terms). To the contrary, the person who truly wishes to be objective about scripture will most likely be the one who is most committed to living out its truths in community. As C.S. Lewis put it “one must look both along (engagement) and at (objectivity) everything.”¹⁴

This engagement with the Spirit and community that Lewis and Newbigen suggest is beautifully reflected in the liturgy of Holy Baptism from the BCP:

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God’s help. (BCP, pg 304)

United by Compassion

To truly “live” the story and be convincing to our pluralistic context, the church must be concerned with more than evangelism, Bible study, and sharing the truth. “It’s impossible to

¹⁴ Walter Hooper, ed., *C.S. Lewis: Readings for Meditation and Reflection*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 53.

give faithful witness to the gospel while being indifferent to the situation of the hungry, the sick, and victims of human inhumanity.”¹⁵ Social justice must be valued and emphasized in order for our attempts at evangelism to be credible in a postmodern world that is cynical towards attempts of proselytizing faith. Bishop Wright puts it this way:

It isn't just a story of some splendid and exciting social work with an unhappy conclusion. Nor is it just a story of an atoning death with an extended introduction. It is something much bigger than these two diminished perspectives. It is the story of God's kingdom being launched on earth as in heaven, generating a new state of affairs in which the power of evil has been decisively defeated, the new creation has been decisively launched, and Jesus' followers have been commissioned and equipped to put that victory and that inaugurated new world into practice.¹⁶

Newbigen puts it even more succinctly:

First it is clear that to set word and deed, preaching and action, against each other is absurd. The central reality is neither word nor act, but the total life of a community enabled by the Spirit to live in Christ...¹⁷

This attitude of “both/and” is theologically played out in our Lord's Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In this passage, Christ commands his followers to make disciples (which implies evangelism), while exhorting them to obey his commands, which would most definitely include social action. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), but works without faith is merely social action that doesn't have at its heart an attitude of worship. “To give bread to the hungry is an action of divine compassion and as such a sign of that which alone can satisfy the infinite desires and

¹⁵ Newbigen, 136.

¹⁶ Wright, 204.

¹⁷ Newbigen, 137.

needs of the human spirit.”¹⁸ In the end, our postmodern and pluralistic urban contexts are ripe for an evangelistic faith that is played out in holistic fashion by boldly sharing our faith while embodying it through embracing the truths of its liturgy and taking it to its next logical step by engaging those who are hurting in our world.

Celebrant and People

Eternal God, heavenly Father,

You have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,

And you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.

Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, pg 365)

II. Sacramental Faith: Community Embodied

Sacred Encounters

It is one of the great tragedies of Christian history that the two signs that most distinguished the church as community- two practices rooted at each end of the axis of history- had by the modern era been sent packing in different directions and have never truly been reunited. The first was the practice of baptism; the second was the practice of Eucharist- what much of the church has called the sacraments, the two practices of his own that Jesus explicitly commanded his church to continue.¹⁹

-Andy Crouch, *The Church in Emerging Culture*

In the middle of the liberal vs. conservative divide among Anglicans many important attributes of the church often were underappreciated and went unnoticed, one of the more central ones being the sacraments. One just has to sift through the headlines in our newspapers to notice this, with much being written about division and very little about Eucharistic sacrifice and mission. In essence, we replaced God’s drama (the Eucharist) that best reflects his presence in our world, for the drama that reflects our *own* quest for truth.

¹⁸ Ibid, Pg 226.

¹⁹ Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Church in Emerging Culture*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 78.

Jesus did not write a book but formed a community. This community has at its heart the remembering and rehearsing of his words and deeds, and the sacraments given by him through which it is enabled both to engraft new members into its life and to renew this life again and again through sharing in his risen life through the body broken and the lifeblood poured out. He is the center of its life. Its character is given to it, when it is true to its nature, not by the character of its members but by his character.²⁰

Here Newbigen's ideas communicate to the church the idea that we should stop demanding that God come to us on our own terms and through our own ideas, but instead, receive the sacraments he has instituted that are attached with his presence and promise.

God's drama is played out with the sacraments in fully embodied ways in which mere words could never suffice. The message we share is "not a set of timeless propositions: it is a story."²¹ This reality confronts the subjectivity of our pluralistic postmodern world in a way that is much more effective than a theological argument. "Through the sacraments, the witness of the Holy Spirit confronts us with forgiveness that is real (not fictitious), real enough to forgive us all our real sins and real enough to demand of us a real response."²² The experience of the sacraments quenches the postmodern hunger for a real story by doing so in a uniquely comprehensive way-flooding our senses with images, symbols, sounds, tastes, and smells. In Eucharistic worship, one just doesn't think about God's reconciling love- but gets out of their seat and experiences it with their senses, up front and in person. In doing so it relates to our culture in which the "medium has become the message" by providing a "message through a multi-sensory medium", namely the sacraments.

Sacred Mission

The common physical actions of the sacraments keep our faith from being merely

²⁰ Newbigen, 227.

²¹ Ibid, 12.

²² Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology*, (Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 239.

internal and individualistic as the practice is deeply communal and missional. Newbigen writes: “To be baptized is to be incorporated into the dying of Jesus so as to become a participant in his risen life, and to share his ongoing mission with the world. It is to be baptized into his mission.”²³ The essentiality of forgiveness and the risen life in both sacraments “speaks of hope among the great enduring realities- an anchor of the soul entering in beyond the curtain which hides the current from us, something utterly reliable.”²⁴ The great hope embodied in the sacraments provides a horizon that speaks to a culture which assumes that ultimate reality is bereft of meaning and so is left with little to hope for.

Living into the hope of the resurrection is a major theme that runs throughout N.T.

Wright’s book “Surprised by Hope”:

...for Paul the resurrection is not just about large scale or public work. It is about the personal and intimate life of resurrection to which each of us is called. It is, in other words, about baptism and holiness...we are committed, in our baptism, to be resurrection people. Verses 2-4 (Romans 6) set out the groundwork: in baptism we died with the Messiah and were raised with him to new life...many have supposed that Paul meant this in a purely future sense, but the point of verse 11 is that it is also a present experience: you must now calculate, do the sum, reckon it up, “consider yourself” to be dead to sin and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus....The revolutionary new world, which began in the resurrection of Jesus- the world where Jesus reigns as Lord, having one the victory over sin and death- has its frontline outposts in those who in baptism have shared his death and resurrection.²⁵

Symbols and tradition are not as powerful in and of themselves if the gospel story actualized through the sacraments does not affect the way we live. Gospel living means we care for the people in our midst in practical ways: if people are hungry, we feed them, if they are lonely, we visit them, and the list goes on. We do all we can to live a life of sacrifice that Christ not only proclaimed, but demonstrated to us in the Gospels. When we begin to engage our world

²³ Newbigen, 117.

²⁴ Ibid, 101.

²⁵ Wright, 249.

with the passion that is on display in the Gospels and in the elements then the sacraments will take on a whole other meaning. The hope is that the sacraments become more than symbolic reminders of a faith from long, long ago. Andy Crouch in the book The Church in Emerging Culture implores us to:

remind ourselves, week by week, that we live a story that does not conform to the way of the world. We do this by dying to ourselves and being raised into a new community and by proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again. By splashing, drowning, and breathing again; by breaking taking eating and drinking; by becoming together a "spiritual house" (I Peter 2:5), a "holy temple" (Ephesians 2:21), small and seemingly lost in the midst of the world's massive buildings, but in fact the first and only outpost of the one kingdom that keeps its promises.²⁶

The Kingdom of God makes itself known by becoming, both in its words and in its deeds, a witness to the reign of Jesus by living a life that is sacrificial by nature.

The Kingdom that is reflected in the Eucharist is not known by a consumerist mindset because a "piece of bread and cup are about as far from a supersize Happy Meal as you can get".²⁷ Instead, it is known by a simplicity that veers far from a life of frenzied consumption-known by simply receiving and not earning or purchasing. "As the promises of communion become more real to us, we see the promises of consumption more and more as the insubstantial nothings that they are."²⁸ This non consumerist mindset will truly stand in stark contrast to our urban centers that are not necessarily known for their restraint and temperance. As people come to terms with what their lifestyle choices are costing them (and I don't mean this in just the monetary sense), many will turn to God and people of faith for a simpler, yet more abundant, way of life.

²⁶ Sweet, ed., 95.

²⁷ Ibid, 83.

²⁸ Ibid, 83.

Sacred Community

As for the sacrament of baptism, it could potentially be one of the church's most powerful responses to individualism by affirming the communal. The BCP does this by sharing these words before the Baptismal liturgy:

Each candidate for Holy Baptism is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons. Sponsors of adults and older children present their candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of the candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidates. It is fitting that parents be included among the godparents of their own children. Parents and godparents are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church. (BCP, Pg 298)

Those who are baptized are no longer their own- they belong to God (Romans 14:7-8), and in belonging to God they belong to the other members of the body. Baptism works as a community builder as the whole congregation comes together with the intention to nurture the faith of the one baptized. Again, the communal aspect of the Sacraments is highly attractive to an urban culture that is in hyper drive and disconnected from a genuine spiritual community.

One of the major tasks of the church today is to remind people of their baptismal vows and their responsibility to nurture one another in faith by entering into their lives in ways that speak to their truest desires. For too many members of the church, Baptism is merely a ceremony that happened to them when they were a baby and has very little impact on how they live their lives today. It's as if baptism is an initiation rite into a group that serves no function or has no importance. In reality our Baptismal vows can, and should, lead us into Kingdom living. In the film, "*The Lion King*", there is a great representation of what needs to come alive today in the church. The film contains within it themes of death and loss, and the importance of remembering your place in the community. There is one scene in particular that resonates for the

church. Rafiki, the wise monkey, must remind the young lion Simba of who he is and what he is capable of:

[Simba looking into a pool of water.] Simba: That's not my father, that's just my reflection
Rafiki: No, look harder. [Simba's reflection changes to that of his father.] You see? He lives in you!
Mufasa's ghost: Simba.
Simba: Father?!
Mufasa's ghost: Simba, you have forgotten me.
Simba: No! How could I?
Mufasa's ghost: You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself Simba. You are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the circle of life.
Simba: How can I go back!? I'm not who I used be!
Mufasa's ghost: Remember who you are. You are my son and the one true king. Remember...
Simba: We'll always be together, right?
Mufasa: Simba, let me tell you something my father told me. Look at the stars, the great kings of the past are up there, watching over us.
Simba: Really?
Mufasa: Yes. So whenever you feel alone just remember that those kings will always be there to guide you and so will I.

As we see our reflection in the Baptismal waters we must remember that the resurrected Christ is looking back at us, asking us to take our rightful place and fulfill our role in helping to build his Kingdom. But he is also reminding us that he is not alone as a resource, we have the body of Christ, both past and present, supporting us, along with his Spirit. How we go about reminding people of their worth to God's kingdom is one of the great tasks of the church and is represented by these words from the BCP's Baptismal Covenant:

Will you continue in the Apostle's teaching' and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Response: I will with God's help. (BCP, pg 304)

The BCP also presents a baptism liturgy that represents the physicality of our salvation by emphasizing living into our baptismal covenant:

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help. (BCP, pg 305)

N.T. Wright describes this fuller sense of salvation by sharing that it's:

(1) about whole human beings, not merely souls; (2) about the present, not simply the future; and (3) about what God does through us, not what God does in and for us. If we can get this straight, we will discover the historic basis for the full-orbed mission of the church.²⁹

In summation, our postmodern times call for the confluence of both an instrumental and sacramental faith that works hand in hand to form a dynamic church that is rooted and reaching out. A missional reengagement of the BCP will enable a new Anglican church that will impact our pluralistic world that is desperate for a communal faith that they can believe in because it is embodied! Newbigen shares once again what's at the heart of being both an instrumental and sacramental Christian tradition:

It's in the life of a community which remembers, rehearses, and lives by the story which the Bible tells and of which the central focus is the story told in the New Testament. This remembering and rehearsing will be through the continual reading of and reflection on the Bible and the continual repetition of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. And it will maintain its link with and its continuity with the body of men to whom Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, so send I you," through a ministry in which the personal call of Jesus, "Follow me" is continued through the generations, not in abstract moral or political principles but in the actual personal encounters in which men and women who have themselves been called, call others to follow.³⁰

III. Baptism: A New Way of Life that Calls for Justice

A Baptism of Repentance

Although the communal aspects of Baptism are extremely important, what also must be recognized is the importance of repentance, and in so doing, confronting injustice and evil. In the following quote, Newbigen points out that

²⁹ Wright, 200.

³⁰ Newbigen, 147.

To be baptized is to be identified with, and incorporated into that which Jesus did when he went down into the waters of Jordan as one of a company of sin burdened men and women and so inaugurated a mission which would lead him through his great encounter with the principalities and powers to its victorious climax in the cross.³¹

The encounters with principalities and powers that Newbigen mentions here are never the main point of Baptismal living, for they can easily be warped into spiritual pride and even a kind of spiritual paranoia where one suspects devils of some sort in all of their interactions with the world. Instead our Spiritual conflicts have more to do with the struggles that come about as we repent of sin and evil in our own hearts and lives and then try to live missionally in our world.

The following words from the baptismal covenant are closely related. This is demonstrated by their proximity to each other in the liturgy, as well as their cause and effect relationship. When those who are baptized resist evil and repent of sin, they are then empowered to share the good news in word and deed by loving their neighbors and striving for justice.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help. (BCP, pg 304-305)

I believe the Baptismal Covenant is echoing the Lord's plea found in Matthew 7:5: "First take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye." What must be said is that in the acknowledgement of our own sin, we must also

³¹ Ibid, 117.

make an effort to recognize the powers and principalities that played a part in our enslavement to sin. Again, the Baptismal Covenant couldn't be more direct:

Question Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Answer I renounce them. (BCP, pg 302)

A Baptism of Redemption

The sins that enslave those in urban contexts have been well covered, examined, and written about. One cannot read the front paper of a metropolitan daily newspaper and not be aware that drug addiction, prostitution, and violence are all too common. One should not assume that the answers to those problems are as simple as a “just say no” campaign (although such campaigns may have their merits). What must be looked at are the underlying symptoms of these societal problems and vices. Those of us who have made Baptismal covenants must live into them by renouncing the evil powers of this world that feed these vices and enslave those in our urban centers. As we do this, our witness for Christ can't help but be strengthened as we gain credibility to those in our urban centers most hurt by these injustices. Not only is our witness strengthened, but a sense of community is developed as people discover their not left alone to fend for themselves with their struggles.

The most obvious area of evil that feeds into our cities struggles is racism and the resulting self hatred that accompanies it. In America, it has been primarily those of a European descent who have subjugated and harmed people of color. The result has been a tendency towards self hatred for people of color, whether Native Americans, African Americans, or Asian

Americans. The racism and self hatred has created an unhealthy cycle that insidiously has these two realities feeding into each other. Authors Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson share in their book *The Heart of Racial Justice* how these dynamics tend to work:

One response to oppression and injustice is to reject and hate ourselves, thinking we deserve the horrifying treatment we have received. The other pole is to become filled with rage and hatred toward the person or group who has caused us such suffering. Tragically, we always become what we hate. Hatred merely fuels a never ending cycle of violence and revenge... we must confess our longing for justice and our appropriate anger, and admit and confess our hatred of others as a violence that reinforces sin. We continue by naming the rage filled identity as a false and destructive identity, and we take our rage into the presence of God and express it to Jesus on the cross.³²

The profound reality of our new identity in Christ is foundational to the theology and meaning of Baptism. We are no longer to be defined by the harm that we have suffered, but by the promise of a redeemed life that exemplifies what baptism is all about, as well as a faith community that vows to support those who are baptized and help them live into that new identity.

A Baptism of Restoration

The promise of a restored life is not just something that the BCP promotes, but is a reality lifted from the text of the sacred Scriptures:

Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12); a washing away of sin (I Cor. 6:11); a new birth (John 3:5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14); a reclothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27); a renewal by the Spirit; the experience of salvation from the flood (I Peter 3:20-21); a exodus from bondage (I Cor. 10:1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3:27-28; I Cor. 12:13)...The baptism which makes Christians partakers of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection implies confession of sin and conversion of heart... those baptized are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ, and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³³

³² Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 82.

³³ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007), 2.

As we live into this new ethical orientation those of us from a European descent must recognize how we have abused our power, repent, and become a part of a community of restoration that no longer feeds into the self hatred that has developed in some people of color. In identifying with the death and the resurrection of Christ through baptism we participate in the subjugation of all cosmic powers that are now under Christ. “The problem of evil...can only be dealt with through Jesus’ own death and resurrection.”³⁴ Though Christ already reigns victorious through the resurrection, the actuality of this truth still lies in the future (Mark 1:15). Frederick Buechner explores this duality in his book Wishful Thinking:

It is not a place (*the Kingdom of God*) of course, but a condition. Kingship might be a better word. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” Jesus prayed...insofar as here and there, and now and then, God’s kingly will is being done in various odd ways among us even at this moment, the kingdom has come already. Insofar as all the odd ways we do his will at this moment are at best half-baked and halfhearted, the kingdom is still a long way off—a hell of a long way off, to be more precise and theological.³⁵

The call of those who are baptized is to live into this new reality by confronting our idolatry and sin.

Many of us have never closely examined how our own ethnocentricity and racism have fed into the powers and principalities that work through corrupt and evil social structures. Whenever we clutch at power and advantage (whether it is individuals, churches, corporations, or governments) at the exclusion of those who are poor and suffering is at the heart of what we must turn from in repentance. “Each nation has its own gods, ideologies, institutions and images

³⁴ Wright, 204.

³⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, (New York, HarperCollins, 1973), 60.

that need to be confronted. And in each nation, the least and the lost and beaten down must be loved and reached and invited into the kingdom community”.³⁶

A major struggle in the call to justice is defining what it is and what it entails. For some, justice means a large government that provides many provisions for the poor, yet others see this approach to government as an abuse of power that creates a dehumanizing and unhealthy dependence for the poor and even hinders individuals and churches in their efforts to bring about justice. These differences must be acknowledged and worked through, with the understanding that Godly people differ on political ideas and role of government. The personal and communal call to care for the poor and marginalized (Matthew 25:31-46) must be our uniting call, and not whether one is Republican or Democrat. That said, we must still be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16) and politically engaged in the hopes of influencing our political leaders and structures so they reflect the values of the Kingdom, while still being careful to go about this in ways that are not coercive or oppressive.

Something deeper than political identification must be at the heart of our attempts to bring about justice in our urban contexts. The BCP’s call to renouncing evil and encouraging repentance, as well as empowering community to care for one another, can and will bring transformation to our world. Simply put, to bring to life our new covenant in Baptism is messy and risky business, but we cannot live into the missional impulse of the BCP without entering into the muck of our world. Rest assured, the Lord’s death and resurrection cleanses us and is our new reality as baptized believers. The BCP sums all of this up with this excerpt from its baptismal liturgy:

³⁶ McNeil and Richardson, 121.

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life. We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (BCP, pg 306)

IV. Eucharist: Reconciliation through Sacrifice

Reconciling Sinners

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world. (BCP, pg 362)

...after communion, the church, in union with the Christ whom it has received, offers itself as a living sacrifice to God.³⁷

-Stephen Neil, in his book *Anglicanism*

My first experience in an Anglican Eucharist worship service made me think of the hungry and impoverished in a soup kitchen line. We, the worshipping community, came together in our own spiritually impoverished state and waited to receive the bread of life and the wine of the true vine. The BCP prepares us for such a nourishing meal by making it clear that none of us deserve it:

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor:
Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen. (BCP, pg 352)

³⁷ Stephen Neil, *Anglicanism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 77.

This prayer uses the pronoun *we* to show that if there is one thing that we hold solidarity with each other it would be our collective sin. Sin, in its very essence divides us, but also ironically unites us- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). In the Baptismal liturgy we have already made clear that we all belong to one another and so with that understanding, we also acknowledge that our own personal sins harm and affect the community. This is why there are two references to “neighbor” in this prayer of confession. While acknowledging our sin before God we must also acknowledge our sins against those we come in contact with, as well as those people who we may not know, but still are affected by our sin.

Reconciling Wrongs

This is why immediately following confession in the BCP’s liturgy we extend “the peace” to one another. The peace is not merely a time when we express pleasantries with each other and wish each other God’s blessings, but instead, a time to reach out in reconciliation with one another by seeking out those we may have wronged or who have wronged us. “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24) Typically the time allotted in the liturgy for “the peace” is not adequate to express all that needs to be said and done in order to achieve real reconciliation, but serves as a reminder that the hard work of reconciliation needs to be pursued throughout the rest of the week. That said, one can take the opportunity to approach someone we’ve been avoiding and reach out with a warm exchange that may initiate the process.

At this point we are more able to enter into the Eucharist with a clear conscience and a thankful heart. The reconciliation that we experience through the confession, absolution, and the

peace section of the BCP liturgy is just an appetizer for the reconciling presence of Christ that we will soon partake in through the communion meal. In this meal we enter into the presence of the One who has made all ethnic groups, tribes, and nations, and are reminded of Christ's sacrifice for all of humanity. Authors McNeil and Salter acknowledge the importance of this sacrifice:

...reconciliation is above all rooted in the work of Christ on the cross. At the cross, God suffered for the sake of his enemy-hostile humanity. Through his death on the cross Jesus made it absolutely clear that the offer of forgiveness has been irrevocably given to all humanity. He emphasized this when he prayed for his executioners, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." At the cross there is forgiveness, healing and freedom for all-perpetrators and victims, sinners and sinned against.³⁸

When we experience the release of forgiveness and reconciliation with God for ourselves, we are more able to go out and practice it with those we interact with.

As we go into pluralistic urban centers we will come in contact with those who have been harmed the most by ethnocentrism and racism. The accompanying anger of such racism will at times be directed towards those who are seeking out reconciliation. None the less, we must still go about asking for forgiveness with an offer to help work towards justice. Like Christ, all of us must take up our cross and be willing to suffer for the cause of reconciliation, knowing that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

This new reconciling reality that is found in the Eucharist reminds us that we are all a part of God's family. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than through these words from Paul in Ephesians 2:14-16:

He is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making

³⁸ McNeil and Richardson, 53.

peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

In these verses you find that Eucharistic worship (in his flesh) is at the heart of reconciliation. In offering himself to us, God in Christ, gives us an example of what true sacrifice and forgiveness is all about. This example is not something that we can only imitate, but also embody-

...as we receive Christ's life into our life more and more, as Christ keeps taking on our flesh, until we are what we eat and can say with Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2:20)."³⁹

Reconciling All Things

The BCP's liturgy makes clear that God's reconciling power not only extends to humanity, but encompasses all of God's creation as well:

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power. Your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love. You formed us in your own image, *giving the whole world into our care*, so that, in obedience to you, our Creator, we might *rule and serve all your creatures*. When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of death. In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you. Again and again you called us into covenant with you, and through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation... To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and *made the whole creation new*. (BCP, pg 373) (Emphasis added)

In this portion of the liturgy you find the familiar battle with sin, this time in regards to taking care of God's good creation. Once again, our struggles and disobedience are remedied through surrendering to Christ's resurrecting power in our lives. As we "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8) we acknowledge our physical dependency on the substances of bread and wine and the importance of taking care of the land that provides it. "Genuine human beings,

³⁹ Desilva, 186.

from Genesis 1 onward, are given the mandate of looking after creation, of bringing order to God's world, of establishing and maintaining communities."⁴⁰

What would it mean for our faith communities if the experience of the Eucharist meant more than looking back in time to the end of Christ's physical life on earth and offering thanks? What if we not only looked back, but looked around and acknowledged that Christ's Kingdom is with us, and looked inside for the courage to live it out? I believe that the reason we make the Eucharist into a memorial service is because we lack the faith to believe that God's Kingdom is really here. This is especially true in our urban centers so marred by racism, poverty, neglect, and the resulting anger that continues to feed into these plights. My prayer and hope is that we find the wherewithal to live like Kingdom people in the midst of our urban centers by becoming a reconciling presence that seeks out forgiveness while offering mercy to those within our reach.

In Conclusion

In the children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit* there are many parallels to what it could mean to bring to life the BCP's liturgy and mission. The Velveteen Rabbit is a stuffed animal that is snubbed by other more expensive and mechanical toys, much like the modern day church has dismissed ancient books such as the BCP for flashier, more user friendly approaches to faith. However, through the love that is exchanged between the stuffed Rabbit and his owner, a young boy, the Rabbit becomes "real". The following excerpt comes from the story and speaks to how we can begin to make the BCP's liturgy become real for those who may be skeptical of the power that resides in sacramental living:

"What is real?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

⁴⁰ Wright, 199.

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

To live sacramentally is to carry Christ with us to the point where we become inseparable and defined by a loving, reconciling presence. As we delve into the mysteries of baptism and Communion we can't help but be transformed and made more "real" to those in our urban centers, and thus more willing to suffer for Christ and for his mission to bring restoration to his creation. The word worship literally means "worth-ship", to recognize the value of something or someone. May we discover each day anew the true worth of our God, his mission, the people in our midst, and our very lives. I close with these words from Bishop Wright:

Worship is nothing more nor less than love on its knees before the beloved; just as mission is love on its feet to serve the beloved- and just as the Eucharist, as the climax of worship, is love embracing the beloved and so embracing the beloved and so being strengthened for service.⁴¹

⁴¹ Wright, 9.

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