

## **Book of Common Prayer comes into its own during lockdown.**

At my church the service I usually attend is the 8am, which every other Sunday uses the words from the Book of Common Prayer. For years the BCP has been sneered at by many in the Church as old fashioned and has too much focus on sin and no longer relevant for today.

In the Church Times of 30 October 2020 there is an interesting article by the Revd Angela Tilby who writes that during these times of lockdown where the difficulties and complexities of life are affecting us more, the BCP actually speaks more directly to our condition. She writes:

“While I admire the efforts of the Prayer Book Society to keep the BCP in circulation, I have never been a Prayer Book fanatic. Common Worship arrived shortly after I was ordained, and, being familiar with Series 2, 3, and the ASB, I enjoyed its forward-looking focus, the emphasis on the work of the Spirit and the coming Kingdom, and the fact that it did not harp on too much about human sin.

Common Worship has been my normative liturgical diet for the past 20 years, and, although I now think that it could have done with fewer options and a more prescriptive expectation in general, I think that the suite of Common Worship volumes has served the Church well. The BCP has been like a shadow in the background, deeply familiar, but also strange, not only from another age, but from another world of meaning.

But the pandemic has made me think about the importance of liturgical tone. In the Common Worship eucharist, we generally come before God in celebratory mode, confident that we are God’s people and cheerfully sharing our camaraderie, corporately acknowledging that we could have done better at fulfilling our vocation if we had tried a bit harder, ready to be inspired by scripture, prayerfully interceding for the Church and the world, and hoping, through our participation in the Liturgy of the Sacrament, to be re-energised for mission and service in God’s world. There is a clear forward movement through the liturgy, helpfully indicated by the templates at the beginning of the service orders. We are dismissed on a high to go in peace to love and serve the world.

Right now, this all rings slightly false. The reality is that we come in masks and sit distanced, sharing little waves from our separate islands. We cannot sing. We can hardly hear one another’s responses. We are strangely passive. It is hard to feel celebratory when the world we come from is angry, frightened, and confused.

At such a time, the shortness, bareness, and starkness of the Prayer Book’s order for holy communion seems newly appropriate. It seems to start in the middle with the priest’s “Our Father”, and it continues, dense and placatory, the heart-rending Confession and the Prayer of Humble Access like cries from a frightened soul that has not quite abandoned its Christian hope.

The rite progresses not in a forward movement, but as through a labyrinth: we never cease to confess our sins and acknowledge our wretchedness, while praising God for his divine majesty and infinite mercy. Counter-intuitively, we all stand up at the end and say the Gloria, as though hoping that something has happened, if not to make the

world a better place, at least to give us courage to go on. I get it now in a way that I never have before.”

Adrian Vincent. November 2020