

## **A Reflection on the Second Form of the Prayer After Communion**

*An introductory note: In the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Eucharist rite offers two options for the Prayer after Communion. In this brief paper Bishop Geoff Woodcroft reflects on the significance of the second form, which he strongly commends for use in the saint benedict's table online gatherings.*

All your works praise you, O Lord.  
And your faithful servants bless you.

Gracious God we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
May we, who share his body, live his risen life;  
we, who drink his cup, bring life to others;  
we, whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,  
so that we and all your children shall be free,  
and the whole earth live to praise your name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

***All your works praise you, O Lord.  
And your faithful servants bless you...***

What is the significance of rehearsing these two sentences after sharing communion? In Western culture, and particularly in Canadian Anglican culture, we may have been taught in past times that *Communion* is an intimate and personal interaction with God, at a defined and controlled moment in Church life. I was taught not to make contact—verbal, touch or even eye contact—with other worshippers, because of the solemnness and intimacy of the holy act. The optic

was that of personal piety, and it may have been assumed that all confirmed Anglicans were supposed to be having that same experience of personal piety.

The language of the Eucharistic prayers and the story as told in the Gospels, Acts, and Paul, suggests, not personal piety—*although that is a desired posture*—but a vigorous and full dialogue among disciples and with God. Communion is a corporate act, and perhaps not as personal and private as our past teachings may have led us to understand. This rich and vibrant conversation/prayer I interpret to be timeless, space-less, and inclusive of the cosmos, which in itself begs us to consider that all God's works—the firmament, the water, single-celled life forms—are in concert with Creator God, and as we pray, we cause an harmonic resonance, which in turn causes the entirety of Creation to sing in praise. AND faithful servants, those called to the feasting table are also those called to tend the world God made, stewards of creation, those who live and respond in deep gratitude for the reality of God's presence, and the Spirit that binding all of creation in One. These opening sentences are not simple formulas with which the officiant leads people out the door; rather, they are statements rehearsing our very earliest Judeo-Christian roots, woven into the fabric of the One God, the same who called Abraham from the land of Ur. These sentences reveal our understanding of God's relationships, sovereignty and love for all creation, God who has made creation to be an endless series of inter-dependant relationships. We who have been called to the feasting table—together—now share a unique and specific role in how re-creation plays out today.

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*Gracious God...* all that we have, all that we are, all that we will be is of God. The symbolism of wine and bread laid out in a meal, a common reality for all God's children, are gifts we have tended and brought back to the feasting table where we meet one another meeting God. *Thank you for feeding us...* it has never been about

us, it is about the love of God for all children, that this meal for which we are thankful, is in fact the instruction and the example of the action we are called to share in the world.

*Share his body...*we do indeed share the bread broken in the activity of Communion; we share also his body broken and resurrected, in its many and varied forms. To live his risen life is to respond God's call as God's Christ, that is:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

God feeds the Church, because the Church must feed the world; God gives life to the Church because the Church proclaims with conviction that the Kingdom is at hand; God has enlightened the Church, because the Church is called to lead children out of slavery, injustice, oppression, and imprisonment every day.

The Church attracts people who trust that the Church provides comfort and healing, that the ceremonies hold truths concerning a world beyond a concrete view, eternal life, forgiveness and gentleness that may not be clearly present in their reality. As the Church we should be concerned about our accessibility and clarity for those for whom we are called to serve with all we have been given: the weary traveller, the infirmed, the seeker, the burdened, the lost, and of course the new disciples whom God has willed them to be found.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, is about what God is doing, and particularly through the actions of Christ. It is in the best interest of the Church to teach how we understand God's intentions and our practices about Communion, while inviting our new relationships to share in the feast as they learn.

This portion of the Prayer after Communion succinctly and intimately binds our sharing in holiness; it is God's continual call for us to be radically, if not recklessly

hospitable in God's mission. It screams against individualism, consumerism, idol worship, greed and sloth. How might we be faithful to the story, the call, and the harmonic resonance of all creation?

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Three words – “all your children”, we cannot hope to fully live *Communion* if we are not willing to fully *commune*.

The following quotation from Stanley Hauerwas', *The Peaceable Kingdom*, thoughtfully explores our covenant relationship with God as members of the Body of Christ, but also as members of the human family. Hauerwas speaks to, and disrupts the core of the believer, so that the believer may again be charged-up by God:

To learn to be God's creatures means we must learn to recognize that our existence and the existence of the universe itself is a gift. It is a gift that wills to have our lives contribute to the eschatological purposes for creation. As creatures we cannot hope to return to God a gift of such magnitude. But we can respond with a willingness to receive. To learn to be God's creature, to accept the gift, is to learn to be at home in God's world. Just as we seek to make a guest feel “at home” in our home, so God seeks to have us feel, “at home” by providing us with the opportunity to appropriate the gift in the terms it was given – that is, gratuitously. (Hauerwas, Stanley, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, p. 27)

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