

Vision Groups Synod Presentation: Continuing to Live the Vision

Life Changing Worship: Thomas Cranmer

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I am Thomas Cranmer, first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, and known by many as the intellectual and spiritual founder of the reformed church in England. I have a vision for a world in which each of us understands that the glory of God is to love the unworthy...that God's love and redemption is for all of us; not based on our own merit but rather on the all encompassing love of God for God's people.

It's likely that's not how you would characterize my vision. I'm better known as the enabler of the multiple marriages of Henry the 8th, the force behind the publication and distribution of The Great Bible (the first English Bible intended for public use), the 1549 and 1552 versions of the Book of Common Prayer; again first English versions of the prayer book, and the Book of Homilies. And while I'm grateful that I was able to introduce the vernacular into our liturgy, I believe that my real mission was to bring the church back to the Gospel message that God's love for us is unconditional and freely given – and inspired by this love that does not depend on any action of yours or mine, our grateful hearts turn us to live in service of God and of other people. Our lives have purpose because we are loved, and so, in turn, we love.

In short, my theology is a religion of the heart. In my view, if our hearts change, then so will our actions and attitudes. One of my objections to the medieval sacramental system was the failure of its ceremonialism to effect real change in the lives of either the priest or the people. My liturgy stresses the need for God to intervene in our hearts; liturgy should transform or change lives.

What does this mean for the church of today? I have to admit sixteenth-century English is an acquired taste, and we shouldn't expect people to have to acquire a specific cultural taste in order to come to know Jesus. So I am the first to admit, some liturgical changes are clearly necessary to meet the needs of your culture. After all, I am the man who set aside centuries of Latin prayers to give the English people a worship service in their own language. But I urge you to think of how you can make the theological insights of the Reformation applicable to your needs today.

At the very least, please recognize what I was trying to do in the liturgy. In Holy Communion I sought to take participants through an order that replicates how a person comes to a living faith in the first place. The whole service is designed to draw believers into falling in love with Jesus all over again; to create places and spaces where God might get some traction in your lives. I urge you to reform liturgy with the same intentionality around biblical faith and shaping hearts. And so, my friends, the work continues...