

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service

Session 20 – The Eucharistic Prayer: Many Variations, One Constant

This is an installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.

Eucharist as feeding for the baptismal journey. The worship we share this morning is not just a random thing, an “Episcopalian” form of worship. Together with Baptism and daily prayer in the home, it goes back to the very beginning of Christianity. Baptism and Eucharist, the Bible tells us, were instituted by Jesus himself. They are integral to what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. Baptism sets us on the course, the journey, he calls us to. The Eucharist feeds and renews us as we travel. This series of bulletin cover notes is an attempt to unfold what Eucharistic worship means.

Many variations. If you worship at St. Andrew's over a few months, through the changes of the liturgical seasons or sampling both the 8:00 and 10:00 services, you will have been struck by the fact that though there is an overall sameness (same bread, same wine, same Lord's Prayer), there are also a number of different forms for the Eucharistic prayer, the prayer that consecrates the bread and wine and occupies the second, Holy Communion, portion of the service. Rite I, the “traditional thee/thou” service in the Book of Common Prayer, has two Eucharistic prayers – Prayer II, which we usually use, slightly tweaks Prayer I, which goes back to the first English Prayer Book in 1549. Rite II, the “contemporary” service, has four forms, A, B, C and D, each of which was composed for the 1979 Prayer Book and each of which has a slightly different emphasis.

Some 30 years ago now, the Episcopal Church issued a supplement to the Prayer Book called *Enriching Our Worship*, which contained three more Eucharistic prayers, the third of which we are currently using. These prayers use more inclusive language and give stronger emphasis to themes such as Creation and the Wisdom of God. The rise of the Internet has also made it possible to draw on Anglican liturgical sources from around the world, which we regularly do. So, many variations!

One common core. But in all of these variations there is a common pattern: what is known as the “fourfold action” of the Eucharist. In all the prayers, the Elements of bread and wine move through the four steps: 1) Take (take to the Altar); 2) Bless (give thanks and invoke the power of the Holy Spirit); 3) Break (symbolic of sacrifice and the Crucifixion); and 4) Share (distribution of Communion and dismissal to service in the world). As the Elements move through these steps, so do we as worshipers. We will explore each of these steps in the weeks to come.