

Mk 14:66-72 & 1 Pet 2:13-17

Cranmer

*Tim Anderson 17/9/17*

We come to the last in our series of reformers,  
marking the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.  
Today we turn to Thomas Cranmer.  
Cranmer was the leader  
who did the most to bring about reform in the church of England.  
Now it would have to be said,  
that Cranmer is not universally celebrated as a great Reformer.  
Everyone celebrates Martin Luther.  
Lutherans and Baptists,  
Anglicans and Germans of no religion.  
Many Christians celebrate Calvin.  
Not just those from a Reformed church  
like the Dutch Reformed or the Presbyterian.  
As I said last week, Anglicans have to read Calvin's Institutes before  
they begin training at Moore College in Sydney.  
But I think it would be fair to say  
that Anglicans are the only ones who celebrate Cranmer.  
My Baptist or Presbyterian friends would look at me pityingly.  
That's the best you can do, is it?  
That's your Anglican excuse for a reformer.  
My Pentecostal friends would be a little more to the point.  
"Cranmer. Never heard of him. Who's that?"  
Why is the great reformer of the Church of England  
accorded so little respect?

He had a little slip up at the end of his life.  
Well OK a big slip up.  
You see, when we look for role models,  
people to look up to,  
we want someone with the courage of their convictions.  
We don't want a vacillating weakling.  
To quote the letter of James,

"Such a person in double minded  
and unstable in all they do."

We want Luther.

"Here I stand.

I can do no other.

God help me.

Amen."

That's a hero.

But Cranmer?

Well he was caught in a very difficult situation at the end of his life.

Cranmer was not like Luther

who had the protection of a Protestant Prince.

Cranmer was not like Calvin

who when he accepted Protestant convictions

hot footed it out of France,

and stayed in cities where the Protestant cause was in the ascendancy.

Cranmer was the Archbishop of Canterbury.

An unknown monk in Saxony can fly under the radar for a while.

A scholar who publishes a commentary on Seneca

can avoid the church's notice.

But what do you do if you are the most senior Archbishop in the land  
and you accept Protestant convictions?

It's difficult to say "See you later folks,

I'm just going to head off to Geneva now."

And you might feel a duty

to wield the position of influence you have been given by God

in the service of his church in your whole nation.

But in the 16th century

the church didn't have the same independence from the secular rulers  
that it now has.

Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII,  
then under Edward VI and finally under Mary.

An Archbishop had to tread very cautiously if he wanted to stay alive.

So what happened at the end of Cranmer's life?

Well when Mary became queen,

she wanted to move the Church in England back to Roman Catholicism.  
Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.  
That is, the first of Henry's six wives.  
Mary was heavily influenced by her mum,  
most girls are.  
Her mum was Spanish.  
It was totally normal  
for Henry to marry someone from the Spanish Royal family.  
That was how the English and the Spanish  
had traditionally kept France under control.  
Intermarry your royal families  
so you can be sure of an ally when France attacks.  
Or sure of an ally when you want to attack France.  
Catherine of Aragon was a devout Roman Catholic.  
So her daughter Mary took on her mother's faith.  
And it might be said, had a significant chip on her shoulder  
about the way her mum was treated.  
Henry had unceremoniously divorced her  
and married the Protestant Anne Boleyn.  
And Cranmer had facilitated both the divorce and the second marriage.  
So when Mary became queen,  
she had a few scores to settle,  
and a church she wanted to bring back to its true home in Rome.  
So basically she began burning bishops.  
Bishops with Protestant sympathies were a hindrance to her plans.  
So she cooked them.  
In October 1555,  
Mary burned Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer at the stake.  
That the Ridley that Ridley College is named after.  
Cranmer was made to watch the executions.  
And she put Cranmer under arrest.  
And she gave him a piece of paper to sign,  
saying that he renounced as heresy his Protestant teachings.  
"If you don't sign it Archbishop, I will cook you too."  
Unlike Ridley and Latimer,  
Cranmer caved in.

He signed the piece of paper.  
Hoping to escape with his life.  
Cranmer bitterly regretted his weakness.  
But there was nothing he could do about it now.  
Mary took the piece of paper and showed it to everyone,  
as proof of how fickle and unprincipled these Protestants are.  
Even their Protestant Archbishop  
doesn't have the courage of his convictions.  
Then she decided to burn Cranmer anyway.  
Too much chance he would change his mind back again, I guess.  
So in March 1556,  
Cranmer was lead out to be burned at the stake.  
There were crowds gathered.  
So he preached his Protestant faith all the way to the bonfire.  
And when it came time for him to be burned  
he thrust the hand that had signed the paper into the fire first.  
It was his way of showing his remorse.

Well Cranmer's capitulation to Mary's threats  
has tarnished his reputation as a great reformer over the centuries.  
Notice that I studied at Ridley College.  
They didn't call it Cranmer College.  
But what does the Bible have to say?  
Does Cranmer remind you of anyone?  
In our reading from Mark,  
we heard Peter deny Jesus.  
Not once but three times.  
Did that stop Peter being used by God afterwards?  
No it did not.  
Like Cranmer, Peter was filled with remorse.  
Like Cranmer he wept bitter tears.  
And Peter was restored by Jesus.  
He repented.  
Jesus forgave.  
And Peter took his place as a leading apostle in the early church.

Cranmer didn't turn away from the Reformation permanently.  
He preached salvation by faith on his way to the pyre.  
Yes Cranmer was weak and compromised.  
Is there anyone here today who is not?  
Jesus died for the weak and compromised.  
Oh that I might preach salvation by faith  
as I walk towards a fiery grave!

OK so that's Cranmer's skeleton in the closet.  
Now what was his contribution to the Reformation?  
Well Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury.  
Unlike Luther and Calvin  
whose influence came by writing and speaking,  
Cranmer had a hand in shaping policy in the church in England.  
He didn't have as free a hand as the Archbishop does today though.  
That was because he was ruled over by the Monarch of the day.  
In Cranmer's day,  
there was a belief in what was called 'the divine right of kings'.  
This is a belief that your king is put there by God,  
so to disobey the king is to disobey God.  
Even if the king is doing something wrong,  
you are bound to obey him  
because of his God given role as your monarch.

Our reading from 1 Peter 2 is the kind of passage people turned to.  
"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake  
to every human authority:  
whether to the emperor as the supreme authority,  
or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong  
and to commend those who do right."  
Who was the Emperor that Peter was telling Christians to submit to?  
He was a pagan.  
He was a pagan who told people to worship him.  
But he is an authority put over you.  
And since everything is under God's sovereign care,  
then God has put the emperor over you.

Now not everyone in Cranmer's day interpreted this to mean that you had to obey the king blindly.  
But make no mistake, Henry VIII certainly interpreted it that way.  
And if you wanted to stay alive as a member of his inner circle, you had to also.  
Or at least behave that way, whatever you thought in your head.  
Now Henry's commitment to Protestant beliefs tended to go up and down depending on the politics of the day.  
So under Henry, Cranmer waited until there was a good opportunity.  
And then he made suggestions.  
His first great triumph was getting an English Bible in every church in England.  
Henry was in a Protestant mood in 1538.  
So Cranmer used that to get Coverdale and Tyndale's English Bible into the churches.  
It doesn't sound like much to us.  
We probably have 100 Bibles in our church.  
But what it meant was that people who have never heard the Bible read, except for in Latin which they didn't understand, could suddenly have the Bible read out to them in the services in words they could understand.  
And that was in every church in the country.  
The letter to the Hebrews tells us,  
"The Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double edged sword."  
Cranmer unsheathed the sword of the Spirit in England.

Cranmer's next big contribution to the Reformation had to wait until after Henry's death.  
When Henry died,  
his son Edward ascended to the throne as Edward VI.  
Edward was only 9 years old when he became King.  
Real power in the land belonged to his two 'Tutors', the dukes of Northumberland and Somerset.  
And these two dukes were Protestants.

This was a time for Protestant leaders in the church  
to make hay while the sun shone.  
Not only did they have a sympathetic boss,  
but they had lots more freedom,  
as you might expect when your boss is nine years old.

So Cranmer made a couple of revolutionary changes.  
He abolished the Latin mass from churches  
and replaced it with his own liturgy.  
And he wrote a set of sermons called the book of homilies.  
These had the effect  
of getting the idea of reform through the whole church.  
Today I'm just going to speak about Cranmer's liturgy.  
Cranmer's prayer book was called the book of common prayer.  
It had such a shaping effect on public worship in England  
that it was used largely unchanged for three hundred years  
in services in the church of England.  
What was novel about the book of common prayer?  
First, it was in English.  
Now not only the Bible could be read in English,  
but also the service could be conducted in English as well.  
Secondly, Cranmer's book of common prayer  
contained responses for the congregation.  
It was a liturgical church service  
where the people were participants not spectators.  
So up until Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer,  
the people pretty much watched  
what the priests were doing up the front.  
The priests had a prayer book in Latin,  
it told them what to say in the services.  
But there was no part of the people in it.  
By necessity, as the people didn't speak Latin.  
But now they had a part in public worship.  
It's hard to emphasise enough how important a change it is,  
for people to move from spectators to participants.  
Your faith grows a whole lot more by doing than by watching.

You don't learn to ride a bike by watching other people ride bikes.  
You have to hop on and have a go.  
When I get people up the front and interview them during services,  
I feel like it's a continuation of Cranmer's work.  
People grow through participation.  
We have better educated more articulate people in the 21st century.  
So the level of the participation needs to be increased  
to stretch our faith.  
But the principal of participation remains.  
What was novel about the book of common prayer?  
Firstly, it was in English.  
Secondly, Cranmer's book of common prayer  
contained responses for the congregation.  
Thirdly, Cranmer's service was soaked in the Bible.  
The services were literally full of quotes from the Bible.  
So people who had never heard the Bible read at all,  
suddenly went to hearing the Bible as part of their church services,  
repeated every Sunday  
until it became embedded in who they were as people before God.  
The Bible is not just a book that tells you what to believe.  
It's a book that can shape your response to God in worship.  
Think about the psalms.  
They don't just tell you things to believe.  
They help you to express your emotions helpfully before God.  
Cranmer's services told the people -  
don't just believe the Bible, use it.  
That's an incredibly important message for today.  
Do you know,  
I've been to church services where there was no Bible reading?  
No Bible in the sermon.  
No Bible as part of the service at all.  
That's sadly not unusual today.  
But we need to worship God, God's way.  
And the Bible is the tool that allows us to do that.

What was novel about the book of common prayer?



Fourthly, the theology of communion that was expressed in it.  
Cranmer's words at the start of the thanksgiving prayer  
are still with us today nearly 500 years later.

"The Lord be with you"

*And also with you*

"Lift up your hearts."

*We lift them up to the Lord.*

What is happening in communion?

Is the Lord Jesus coming down from heaven  
to become part of the bread and wine?

No he is not.

So if Jesus is not coming down,  
what is happening?

Our hearts are going up.

"Lift up your hearts."

*We lift them up to the Lord.*

Colossians 3:1 says this,

"Since then, you have been raised with Christ,  
set your hearts on things above,  
where Christ is,  
seated at the right hand of God."

"Lift up your hearts."

*We lift them up to the Lord.*

What is happening in communion  
is that we take our eyes off the mundane.

What you had for breakfast is not what we are thinking about now.  
Instead we are thinking about the glorious reality of our faith.

Colossians continues,

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

Brothers and Sisters, we have been united with Christ.

That is the reality.

And when we celebrate communion,  
we are celebrating that reality.

We are setting our hearts on things above.

Those things are true things.

They are already the reality,  
because we are already united with Christ.  
But the world around us keeps distracting us from the wonderful reality.  
So we celebrate communion to remind ourselves.  
We remind ourselves not just of what Jesus did for us 2000 years ago,  
but also what Jesus is doing for us right now.  
"You died and your life is now (right now) hidden with Christ in God."  
"Lift up your hearts."  
*We lift them up to the Lord.*

What should we do with the legacy of Cranmer?  
Let's not be ashamed of his weakness.  
Luther and Calvin stumbled into sin as well.  
The reason that they are forgiven by history and Cranmer is discarded,  
is because their sin was the sin of being too tough,  
whereas Cranmer's sin was in being too weak.  
And we have our view of a hero  
shaped by Greek mythology not the gospel.  
What does a hero truly look like for the Christian?  
It's a repentant forgiven sinner.  
A repentant forgiven sinner who serves Jesus with their whole heart.  
Cranmer did that.  
Yes imperfectly.  
But he was like the apostle Peter who denied Jesus.  
A flawed sinner, yet one used by God for the reform of his church.

The other thing to do with the legacy of Cranmer  
is to take the principles of his liturgy and apply them today.  
Cranmer believed in the whole people of God participating in worship.  
That's a great principle.  
The church will grow strong  
when the faith of the church members is strong.  
The faith of the church members grows strong,  
when the church members participate in the ministry of the church.

That's not just about Sundays,

but it is about Sundays.

We want more lay people testifying to God's work in their lives.

More lay people teaching Trinity Kids.

We want more lay people

doing what David and Roger have done for the last two weeks,  
and led services.

Lay people leading the congregation in prayer.

Well trained lay people preaching.

These things grow the church

because they grow the members of the church.

On other days we want more lay people leading Bible studies,

more lay people getting involved with mission organisations,

lay people doing Christianity Explored with friends,

lay people leading youth groups and Nursing home services,

Lay people visiting the sick and the house bound,

Lay people serving Jesus in local schools,

lay people serving the community through the Op Shop

and the Mission to Seafarers.

These things grow the church

because they grow the members of the church.

Cranmer would be amazed if he saw all that happening.

In his day, the clergy did the ministry of the church.

But I'm convinced we are being faithful to Cranmer's legacy.

The man who wrote liturgy the whole church participated in

would smile on our participation today.

And more importantly,

the Bible speaks to us a Christians about serving Jesus.

The Scriptures never divide off Christian leaders,

and say that only they will be given gifts to serve the church.

Rather "To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given

for the common good."