

The Book of Common Prayer

What is the BCP?

The Book of Common Prayer, also known as just the prayer book or the BCP, is a collection of several different things. It has liturgies and prayers, it contains a catechism and the psalms as well as a list of holy days, and it even includes some interesting historical documents. But, like many things it is more than the mere sum of its parts. The Book of Common Prayer has come to be the unifying (mostly) instrument of the worldwide Christian tradition known as Anglicanism.

Unlike many other traditions, Anglicanism lacks a unique confessional formula, it doesn't have prescribed dogma, a centralized leadership, nor does it have a venerated founder whose philosophy or theology still guides us our self-understanding. Though there are loosely held global structures to unite Anglicans; at heart all that the various global Anglican churches have in common is a shared tradition defined by the BCP.

Though most of the churches in the worldwide Anglican communion have produced prayer books that reflect their particular context and culture; a comparison of them would show that they are vastly more similar than different. The core of Anglicanism can be defined as the search for the *via media*, or the "middle way" between the extremes in forging a way of faith accessible to the majority of people and the BCP has both reflected and formed this way of faith throughout its history.

In this study, we're going to start with explaining how the BCP came to be and highlight some of the key struggles over its contents. Then we'll move into an examination of its constituent parts and see how they inform our public worship as well as aid in our personal devotions and life of faith.

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Part 1 – Setting the Stage

Let's start by taking a look at the role of Christianity in the late Middle Ages. At that time, the western, or catholic, church was a very powerful and wealthy institution with deep connection to the various ruling families of Europe. Most bishops, abbots and abbesses as well as most clergy in the larger churches were themselves members of aristocratic families. Cathedrals and monasteries owned vast tracts of land; for example, in the 12th century at least 25% of English land was controlled by the church and bishops were seen as (and lived like) princes.

In medieval times, the lord of the manor collected taxes and was the judge for all criminal and civil disputes. On lands owned by the church that meant the local bishop, or in the case of a monastery or convent, the abbot or abbess, was the civil as well as the religious authority. And since the church was a trans-national institution, that meant a great deal of the moneys raised through taxes and fines (as well as from commerce) was sent overseas to Rome.

It was also not uncommon at that time for bishops and priests to be appointed to multiple positions, so that someone could be the bishop of multiple dioceses or the priest over multiple parishes. In many cases, the appointed cleric never even set foot in the place they were appointed to, but rather collected the money for themselves and hired others to do the work.

In the minds of most people society was divided between the religious and the secular, but those words didn't mean then what they might mean to us today. Secular didn't mean un-religious; rather it meant people who worked out in the world (this included most parish priests as well, or travelling monks). The religious weren't churchgoers (everyone was expected to attend at least a few times each year) but those who lived in set-aside communal settings such as monasteries, convents, and cathedral chapters.

Basically, the "secular" people paid taxes (tithes) to support the "religious" people, with the expectation that the religious would pray for the whole community and do works of charity.

By 1500, this whole system was coming under great stress. The Crusades of the 12th and 13th centuries had opened up trade routes to the East and the wealth generated was beginning to spread, giving rise to a wealthy merchant class which sought to wrest power from the aristocracy. The Black Death, or Bubonic plague of the 14th and 15th

centuries had decimated the population and upended the economic system of serfdom, giving more power and money to laborers and especially to skilled craftspeople, while also undermining the established authority of the aristocrats and the church.

The development of the printing press and the consequent rise in literacy led to an explosion of ideas as well as making scripture and theology (heretofore the sole province of the church) widely accessible to many more people who began to question the often overly-complex contemporary interpretations that guided the church's policies.

And lastly, the discovery of the Americas at the end of the 15th century caused many to reconsider pretty much everything; reasoning that if the church and academics hadn't known about a whole other hemisphere of the world, what else might they have been wrong about?

So, in the 16th century, all of these forces combined to wholly remake European society, and most especially to remake the role of the church in people's lives. This religious upending is usually called the Protestant Reformation, but it also led to significant changes within the Roman Catholic church (the counter-Reformation).

For those reformers we identify as Protestant, their primary goal was wrest control of the church from the religious and claim it for the secular. In other words, to open up the spiritual richness of religious life to everyone.

Book of Common Prayer Part 2 – English Reform?

We tend to think of the Protestant Reformation as beginning with Martin Luther in 1517. In reality, there were other reformers, with ideas and issues similar to Luther's in the century or so before his protest movement, but it was Luther who was finally able to gain traction and take hold, partly due to the increasing ability of printers to distribute his written work, partly due to a changing political situation in central Europe, and partly because Luther wrote in a highly inflammatory and entertaining style.

Aside from Luther, the two most important continental reformers in the early 16th century were Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin, both of whom were Swiss. All three of these favored theocratic societies where Christian doctrine was enforced by the civil authority, though they differed on how exactly that should be accomplished and in the details of their theology.

Things were different in England. There was very little desire for significant change within English society and the English king, Henry VIII was a devout catholic. In fact, Henry was given the title "Defender of the Faith" by Pope Leo X in 1521 in recognition of Henry's very popular takedown of Luther titled "Declaration of the Seven Sacraments Against Martin Luther."

Within ten years of Henry's book though, the situation in England changed dramatically, primarily owing to Henry and his wife Catherine's troubles with childbearing. Henry and Catherine had six children, four of whom were stillborn, one of whom died at seven weeks, and a daughter Mary (who would become Queen one day). Henry and the English aristocracy were deeply concerned at the lack of a male heir, feeling that a potential Queen would be destabilizing to the kingdom.

Henry came to believe that he was being punished by God for marrying his brother's wife in contravention of Leviticus 20:21. Henry's older brother, Arthur, had married Catherine, but died months later when Henry was only 10. This belief of divine punishment, coupled with concern over producing a legitimate male heir led to Henry's seeking of a divorce from Catherine in 1527. However due to political concerns, the pope (Clement VII) declined to grant the annulment of Henry and Catherine's marriage because he was dependent upon the military support to the Hapsburg emperor who just happened to be Catherine's nephew.

By the 1530's Henry was ready to break from Rome's authority (and taxing ability) though he had little or no desire for religious change as he remained quite conservative in his own religious beliefs. The formal separation was accomplished through acts of Parliament in 1533 and 1534, which dissolved the monasteries and convents (giving all the land and incomes to Henry) and named the crown as Supreme Head of the Church in England, which granted Henry control over the appointment of bishops. However, Henry made no changes to the structure or liturgy of the church. Mass was still in Latin, all the saint's days were recognized, and people were still expected to earn (or buy) their way into heaven.

However, a small faction of nobles (including Anne Boleyn's family), had become committed to the cause of church reform in line with the Protestants in Switzerland in Germany, and began pressing for changes in England along those lines. Henry resisted these and little changed in his lifetime.

So, even though Henry brought about the Church of England, he was very far from being a Protestant reformer.

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Part 3 – the Real Reform

When Henry died, his son (from his marriage to Jane Seymour) Edward VI ascended to the throne. As Edward was only nine at the time, there was a regency of adult relatives who, as it turns out, were committed Protestants - and Edward was raised to be one as well. It is in Edward's reign that full blown Protestantism was inaugurated beginning almost immediately with reading the Epistle and Gospel in English and allowing the laity to partake of the wine in communion. In 1547, the first piece of liturgy in English was written and called to be read out loud in all churches. This was the Great Litany which was actually written to incur divine favor after significant losses in a war with Scotland.

It was also in Edward's reign that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer compiled the first Book of Common Prayer which was finalized and ordered to be used in all churches in 1549. This first Book of Common Prayer leaned heavily upon the Lutheran understanding of eucharist (that Christ is really present) and didn't actually get rid of the Latin Mass, but merely inserted English bits here and there. The primary goal of this first BCP was to introduce more English into the mass to make it more accessible and to reduce the number of volumes priests needed to lead a service.

Also in the late 1540's, a number of reform-minded continental scholars and clerics fled to England to escape the Thirty Years War and brought with them much more radical ideas. Their ideas influenced a small, but powerful group of men in court and parliament who pushed for greater reforms than the 1549 BCP allowed, which led to the creation of another in 1552 (also compiled by Cranmer).

This book was strongly influenced by the Swiss Reformation (Calvin and Zwingli) and explicitly denied any real presence of Christ in the sacrament and eliminated other sacramental actions like the anointing the sick, baptized, and ordained, and the use of holy water. At the same time laws were passed outlawing things such as kneeling during the eucharist, the use of candles, and stone altars.

These changes were not passively received, and often met with resistance, both covert and overt, including an actual armed rebellion in western England. However, the reformers had the power of the state in their hands and were willing to employ it brutally.

Shortly after this book was promulgated, King Edward, still only 15 years old, died. He was succeeded by his older sister, Mary who promptly threw all the reformers in jail, executed quite a few (including Thomas Cranmer), reestablished the supremacy of the Catholic church and outlawed the BCP. But Mary's reign, like her brother's, was short-lived, lasting only five years. She is sometimes remembered as Bloody Mary, though in truth her reign was no more ruthless than Edward's had been in its brutal response to religious dissent. Henry had firmly established that to oppose the monarch's religion was to oppose the monarch – that is, religious dissent was treason.

Mary was succeeded by her sister, Elizabeth, who had been raised Protestant, but was not of the same mind as the most radical reformers. Recognizing the need to bring peace and stability to the nation, Elizabeth once again established the supremacy and independence of the Church of England. She had the 1552 BCP revised in 1559 to introduce a more conservative Protestantism and a liturgy that allowed room for a variety of beliefs. She is famously recorded as having said that she sought “no windows into men's souls.” Along with the new prayer book came the 39 Articles and book of homilies meant to be used to explain the outlines of Protestant faith.

Elizabeth's efforts to moderate religious conflict is known as the Elizabethan Settlement, and though she was pretty bold in bringing it about, it was effective, in the long run, in making England a Protestant nation and is really the beginning of Anglicanism and its search for the *via media*.

Though, by the end of her long reign, Protestants made up the majority of English people and Catholicism had come to be seen as treasonous (War and an attempted invasion by Spain and series of plots to assassinate the queen by Catholics didn't help), some small number of protestants were not satisfied with the extent of reform under Elizabeth and they dissented from the CoE and the new prayer book.

This radical group came to be known as Puritans. The Puritans became increasingly strident in their dissent and began to face serious sanctions by the state. A large number of them fled England, either to Europe or to the newly established Puritan Theocracy in the Massachusetts Bay colony in America. Eventually, the tension became too great and a civil war broke out that the Puritans won. They executed the king (Charles I) and established a radical Calvinist theocratic protectorate under the authority of Oliver Cromwell.

Cromwell, largely dismantled the Church of England, substituting a presbyterian model and outlawed the BCP. He also vigorously persecuted Catholics and dissenters outside of his own Puritanism. When he died, he was succeeded as Lord Protector by

his son Richard. But the general unhappiness under Oliver Cromwell's rule erupted, under Richard, into outright revolt. Richard, without his father's support from Parliament and the army was forced to step down after only a few months. The protectorate ended shortly afterwards as a Royalist army invaded from Scotland and restored the monarchy under Charles II in 1660.

In 1662, another version of the Book of Common Prayer was promulgated. This version was very similar to the 1559 book and was the first to include the whole Psalter. This prayer book is still the official BCP of the Church of England.

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Part 4 – the Glorious Revolution

Apart from the Puritan stronghold in New England, as English immigrants came to the Americas, they brought the Church of England and the BCP with them. In the 150+ years between the settlement at Jamestown and the outbreak of the Revolution, the Church of England in America grew and prospered. On the eve of the Revolution, Anglicanism had come to be the dominant Christian tradition throughout the colonies, and was even making significant inroads in New England, especially Connecticut.

The Revolution nearly killed it. Unlike in England, there were no bishops in British North America (not just for Anglicans either, there were no bishops of any kind prior to 1784). The entirety of the British Empire was under the spiritual authority of the Bishop of London and colonial clergy were largely supplied (and paid) by English missionary societies, the largest of which was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), thus almost all of the clergy were Englishmen, as few American aspirants had the connections or funds to travel to England for study and ordination.

Unsurprisingly, as the Revolution began, many of these clergy left because they remained loyal to the crown and perhaps more importantly, they could no longer get paid. Something like 85% of Anglican clergy abandoned their parishes. Many who stayed were loyalists (like Samuel Seabury) and so the Church of England in America was neither popular nor well organized.

As the war ended, the few American clerics and dedicated lay leaders sought to reorganize and reinvigorate Anglicanism in the new United States. By 1784, they had split into two factions regarding how to proceed. One group wanted to seek a bishop by sending someone(s) to Britain to be ordained in accordance with the tradition and the other group thought they should just name their own bishops and not worry about the niceties of apostolic succession. That second group, the larger and more energetic of the two, became the Methodists. The first group became the Episcopalians, who held their first organizing convention in 1784 and decided that Samuel Seabury should be the fellow to become the first American bishop.

At the time, it was illegal under English Law for him to be consecrated a bishop, but in Scotland, the Anglicans were not under English Law and were not part of the established church, so they agreed to do the consecration with one condition; that the Americans begin using an epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer (the epiclesis is the bit where the presider asks the Holy Spirit to descend upon the bread and wine).

The first task of the new Episcopal church was to create their very own BCP, the English one having lots of troubling references and prayers to the king. This they did in 1789, and keeping the commitment to the Scots, added an epiclesis to the eucharistic prayer.

The American prayer book has been edited 3 times since, in 1892, 1928, and 1979. The 1979 revision, which is the version currently in use, was a far sweeping change that cemented an Anglo-Catholic viewpoint, which was a reason for much of the resistance to it, though in every case since 1549, people have complained about the “new” prayer book.

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Part 5 – Overview of the 1979 BCP

The 1979 Revision of the Prayer Book was a pretty significant change from earlier prayer books. It came about in a time when many ancient liturgies were being discovered, when there was a lot of energy around ecumenism, and in the wake of Vatican II, which really shook up the religious firmament, and the changes created reflected the tumult of the era in which was created.

Here are some of the key changes introduced in 1979

Calendar of Saints

- The 1979 book was the first to include a calendar of minor saints. Previously only the Red Letter Days (disciples, apostles, and gossellers) were included

Daily Office

- Added services for Noonday prayer and Compline

Holy Week

- Offered special services for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. Previously the services for these days were the regular order of service for the Daily Office or Eucharist.

Holy Baptism

- Explicitly stated the baptism was the entry rite into full participation in the church (Confirmation had been a requirement for communion previously)
- Did not differentiate between children and adults
- Explicitly said that Baptism should be the principal service on a Sunday
- Defined more clearly what Baptism is through the Baptismal Covenant (Apostles Creed + 5 Affirmations + Prayers for Candidates + Thanksgiving Over the Water)

Eucharist

- Explicitly states that Eucharist should be the principal service on Sundays
- Multiple Rites for Eucharist with different Atonement theories expressed in each one
- Rites in contemporary and traditional language
- Options for Prayers of the People
- Explicitly allowed for reservation of the sacrament

- Re-ordered the service to mimic the feeding stories in the Gospels (Take, Bless, Break, Give)
- Gave instructions and a template for celebrating eucharist outside of Sunday morning (aka Rite III)

Pastoral Offices

- Replaced the Churaching of Women with A Thanksgiving for the birth or adoption of a child.
- Added rites for Reconciliation of a Penitent (Confession)

Other

- Greatly expanded the selection of Prayers and Thanksgivings
- Expanded the catechism beyond the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments, and sacraments of Baptism and Communion
- Added a section of historical documents

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Part 6 Calendar of the Church Year
pp 15-36

The first significant section of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer is a section that most people may never have looked at closely; The Calendar of the Church Year. In this section is laid out the pattern of the Christian Year, the date of major feasts and special devotions as well as the calendar of Saints Days.

As the Prayer Book says; "The Church Year consists of two cycles of feasts and holy days: one is dependent upon the movable date of the Sunday of the Resurrection or Easter Day; the other, upon the fixed date of December 25, the Feast of our Lord's Nativity or Christmas Day." Easter, the annual remembrance and celebration of Christ's victory over Death lies at the center of the Christian Year as well as the center of Christian life. Everything flows from it, which is why the early church focused a great deal of its energy on developing a formula for determining the exact date of Easter (which is based on an ancient lunar cycle rather than our customary solar cycle).

In its essence, the church's calendar is constructed to allow the congregation to re-experience the disciple's experience of Christ, his anticipation, life, death and resurrection in order that we too may say "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." The Christian faith is founded upon the human experience of God as manifested in Jesus and our relationship with both the resurrected Christ and others who have experienced this same God. The Church year, then, as expressed in our worship is a kind of experienced catechism.

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Part 7 – The Daily Office

pp37-144

In our Anglican tradition, the daily cycle of prayers of monks and nuns were reconfigured by Thomas Cranmer as the Daily Office: Morning and Evening Prayer, to be used by the whole people of God and not just those pursuing “religious” life. The structure of Morning and Evening Prayer have changed very little since the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549. At the heart of the Daily Office are the Psalms. The Psalms cover the width and breadth of the human encounter with God and they teach us that no human experience or emotion cannot be brought before God.

Because of their centrality in the Daily Office, the whole Psalter is included in the Book of Common Prayer beginning on page 585. The Daily Office also includes a schedule of Scripture readings. These readings cover almost all of Scripture in a two-year cycle; so that a faithful discipline of Daily and Evening Prayer will bring you to read most of the Bible every two years. The cycle of readings is called the Lectionary and can be found beginning on page 934. Odd numbered years follow the Year One cycle and even the Year Two cycle.

In the 1979 Prayer Book the offices of Noonday Prayer and Compline were added. Noonday prayer is pretty self-explanatory, and Compline is meant to be said late in the evening. Both of these are very short, self-contained services which can be prayed in 10-15 minutes.

The Daily Office section also has short forms for Daily Devotions (p 136) which can be used by individuals and families as a way of being mindful of God’s presence throughout our days, but are less formal than the daily offices. In our modern age, there are, of course, apps and websites that allow one to pray the daily office without having to refer to a physical copy of the prayer book.

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Part 8 – The Great Litany and Collects
pp148-261

The Great Litany was the first piece of liturgy ever to be published in English. In 1544 Archbishop Cranmer created the Litany from earlier medieval call-and-response prayers; five years before the first Book of Common Prayer. Originally created to be a national prayer of supplication during a war between England and Scotland, the Litany came to be used at the beginning of services on Festival days. The Litany itself has elements of confession and petition and is often thought of as being penitential and is often used during Lent.

The Collects of the church year are organized into two sections, Traditional and Contemporary. The traditional uses the Elizabethan forms we usually associate with Rite I services which was the form of worship in the Episcopal Church prior to the introduction of the 1979 Prayer Book. By and large, the Contemporary Collects are the same as the Traditional in content, but with more modern language.

Each Sunday and all major Feasts have collects and readings assigned for that day, this collect and reading combo is called the “Proper.” Propers have names, such as “the Second Sunday of Advent” or numbers, such as “Proper 25.” As previously mentioned, the church year is designed to invite us to experience the life of Jesus as the disciples (ie; Israel) did and to reflect upon how we are called to continue His mission and ministry. Each of these (experiencing Jesus and Reflecting on Jesus) takes up half the year. The first part is accomplished from Advent to Pentecost. The other half of the year, from Trinity Sunday to Christ the King prompts us to reflect on how we live out Jesus’ example in the here and now. Where the first half has seasons that correspond to major phases in Jesus’ life, the second half is known as “Ordinary” time. Ordinary here meaning “ordered” or “numbered” – that is, it uses the numbered propers!

The origin of collects in the liturgy is very ancient in the Western Church and the origin of the word “collect” to describe this prayer is in some dispute. One theory is that the prayer represents a summation or a “collection” of the individual prayers of the congregation; another is that the prayer symbolized the gathering or the “collection” of the people for mass. At any rate, no matter its origin, the Collect in our modern liturgy serves largely to sum up the theme of the day’s assigned scripture readings. Every Sunday of the church year, and most festival days have their own distinct collect.

Over time, the collect has also come to have a fixed format (like a sonnet or haiku), not based on syllables or meter, but on structure. The basic form of the collect is a three-part structure; the Address, the Petition and the Conclusion. The Address begins by naming God to whom we pray and then usually describes an attribute or action that God has shown in the past. The Petition lays out what it is we are asking of God and is usually expressed as a desire for God to do a new action similar to the action in the past named in the Address. The Conclusion is usually an appeal for God's grace through Jesus Christ and includes a doxology, or brief statement of belief in the nature of the Trinitarian God.

An example: 2nd Sunday after Christmas, Traditional

O God, who didst wonderfully create, and yet more wonderfully restore, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, thy Son Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

The address is to God O God and the action in the past is "who didst wonderfully create, and yet more wonderfully restore, the dignity of human nature: "The petition then, building on that past action is "Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity." And then the conclusion, with doxology with acknowledgment of the Trinity is: "thy Son Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen"

Aside from their intended use in worship, the Litany and the Collects offer forms of prayer which are easily adapted to personal devotions and meditations. This formula can also be guide to us when we voice our own prayers and it roots our prayers in the lived experience of God. In truth these prayers represent some of the finest spiritual writing in the English language.

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Proper Liturgies for Special Days
pp 264-295

This section contains the forms of worship used to bracket the season of Lent, Ash Wednesday at the beginning and Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil for the end. This section marks the beginning of the liturgies contained in the Prayer Book. But what is a liturgy?

Most of us associate the word liturgy with a form of worship. Originally though, liturgy meant a public work paid for with private money. In the ancient Roman Empire, oftentimes very wealthy persons would pay for a road or an aqueduct or public building entirely with their own money. The early church developed with a strong missionary sentiment and understood its purpose as being to benefit the whole of society. Former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple said it best when he noted that "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." The worship of the church then, like the ancient Roman practice is a public benefit completed out of private resources. We come together to prepare ourselves for going out to continue Christ's work in the world

Though Christians have marked these days for centuries, these particular liturgies, as noted above, are fairly recent additions to the Episcopal tradition. At the beginning of the English Reformation, in the sixteenth century, they were jettisoned from Anglican worship because they were thought to be symptomatic of the "superstitious" nature of medieval Christianity to which the Reformers were opposed.

Ash Wednesday reappeared with a liturgy of its own in the 1892 Prayer Book. The others had assigned Scripture readings and Prayers in the 1892 Prayer book but did not officially have separate liturgies in the Episcopal Church until a form for trial use was published in 1960 in a supplemental book called the Book of Offices, inspired by the twentieth century Liturgical Movement. The rites included in the 1979 BCP greatly expanded on those first published in 1960.

Ash Wednesday has its origins in the very early Church. In those days, Baptisms were principally done in a vigil service prior to Easter; in addition, those who had left the church or who had been expelled, but who were seeking readmission (called Penitents) were also readmitted at this time.

New Christians and Penitents were expected to undergo a period of fasting and intensive prayer prior to baptism. Based on Jesus' own period of fasting just after His baptism, this period of preparation by Penitents and New Christians eventually came to last 40 days. Since Sundays are all feast days (days when you aren't supposed to fast), these forty days were spread across seven weeks and came to be the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday then, was marked as the beginning of this special period of baptismal preparation.

Palm Sunday originated in Jerusalem in the fourth century, where all the city's Christians would re-enact Jesus' entry into Jerusalem by processing to the actual sites the Sunday before Easter. In the Anglican tradition, Palm Sunday focused on the reading of the Passion gospel, but the current Prayer Book restored the ancient tradition of the procession with Palms, so that now the service begins with the triumph of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and ends with Christ's death on the cross.

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday comprise the services for "Holy Week." Holy Week services follow closely the Passion narratives recounting of Jesus' final days. At Maundy Thursday, we gather as Jesus and his disciples did to remember the Last supper; Good Friday marks the death of Christ; and Holy Saturday our sense of loss. Holy Week concludes in the Great Vigil of Easter which begins in the dark of death and concludes with the emergence of the light which is Christ. These liturgies are constructed as a single service, each one picking up where the last left off – which is why there aren't welcoming acclamations or dismissals in these liturgies.

These Special Liturgies mark the truth of the Resurrection, the central promise of God's saving work in this world. In these traditions, we prepare ourselves to experience, once again, the emotionally packed experiences of Christ's Passion, his willingness to die that we might know that God's final word for us is life and not death.

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Part 10 – Holy Baptism

pp298-314

The 1979 Prayer Book significantly re-worked the rite of Baptism, especially with the introduction of the Baptismal Covenant, to place it more prominently within the life of the Christian community. Often, in the past, baptisms were done in private, but the 1979 Prayer Book makes explicit that baptism should occur within a service of Eucharist with the assembled congregation. It also lays out 5 days when baptism is especially appropriate; the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints, 1st Epiphany (Baptism of our Lord), and whenever the bishop is present.

The Liturgy begins with the Presentation and Examination of Candidates. The candidate for baptism and their sponsors (godparents) confirm their desire for the baptism and commit themselves to grow in faith together. The role of sponsor should be an important one; these people can make a huge difference in the lives of those they sponsor and no one should accept the invitation to be a sponsor who is unwilling to remain committed to the one they have sponsored.

After affirming their desire for baptism, the candidates are asked to renounce sin and evil and to affirm their commitment to Christ and a Christian life.

Renunciations

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Affirmations

- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

The community who witnesses the baptism is then asked to affirm their commitment to accepting the one baptized into the community of faith by answering this question;

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?

At the very beginning of the service, the Prayer Book says;

Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.

At its core, the Christian faith is relational, it is a relationship with God, but also between the members themselves. Thus, the communal affirmation is not to be taken lightly, but is a pledge to God to enter into relationship with another member of Christ's body. It is only after the commitment of the individual to community and the community's commitment to the individual that we enter into the Baptismal Covenant.

The Covenant has three parts; the communal affirmation of faith in the Apostle's Creed, the community's prayers for the candidate, and the thanksgiving over the water of baptism. The Apostle's Creed is one of the earliest statements of the Church's understanding of the nature of God as three persons in such perfect unity and relationship that they are one God, and of the nature of Christ's mission and promises for the future. Continuing from the Creed, the whole community affirms their intent, with God's help, to live a life in remembrance of Christ's and to participate in the life of the church.

In the earlier affirmations by both the candidate and the community, the promises were in accord with what each individual was able to do. In the affirmations appended to the creed there is a shift. Here the whole community (candidate and congregation together) affirm that what is asked can **only** be accomplished with God's help. That is, the rite recognizes the importance of cultivating faith in accomplishing God's designs for us.

- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The prayers over the candidates ask God to continue the good work started because baptism itself is not the end goal, of course, but the beginning; the beginning of a different way of living. Through baptism, we invite the Holy Spirit to enter into someone's very being so that their life from there forward might be different. And so, it is fitting that, as a community we should pray that such a transformation might happen and continue.

- Deliver them, O Lord, from the way of sin and death.
- Open their hearts to your grace and truth.
- Fill them with your holy and life-giving Spirit.
- Keep them in the faith and communion of your holy Church.
- Teach them to love others in the power of the Spirit.
- Send them into the world in witness to your love.
- Bring them to the fullness of your peace and glory.

And then the concluding collect is;

Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and forever. Amen.

The Thanksgiving over the Water, recounts the history of God's people, showing how water has often figured prominently in that history. Especially we remember the journey of ancient Israel across the desert and through the Jordan River into their promised home. In the rite of baptism, we too take this journey, crossing our own symbolic Jordan and entering into the new promised "land" of Christ's body.

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.
Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.
Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism itself, is fairly simple - the candidate is immersed in water or has water poured over them three times, once each in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Afterwards the newly baptized member is anointed with special oil, called Chrism. The Chrism is oil that has been blessed by the bishop, symbolizing our

community's connection to the whole church. After the anointing, or chrismation, the newly baptized is welcomed by the whole congregation.

Book of Common Prayer

Part 11 – Holy Eucharist

pp316-409

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer offers six options for Eucharistic services, two in Rite I and four in Rite II. The Rite I liturgies use the traditional language of previous prayer books; in many cases using the exact wording as the very first Prayer Book of 1549. Rite II puts the liturgy in contemporary language (or at least the contemporary language of 40 years ago). Having options in the liturgy of Eucharist is the single biggest change and departure from earlier versions of the Prayer Book.

The intent of the framers of this Prayer Book was to capture some of the diversity of Eucharistic prayers found in the ancient church. Basically, there are four primary streams of ancient Eucharistic tradition, Roman, Gallican, Syrian, and Alexandrian. Each of these are captured in our prayer book. An additional benefit of the different Eucharistic Prayers is that they express the different ideas of the Atonement which have currency in the church.

By Atonement, we mean the reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. The church has never defined a single doctrine of the Atonement, which is to say that though we know that we are saved through the actions of Jesus Christ, we do not fully know how that works. There are several theories, but three primary ones, Moral Influence theory, Ransom theory, and Satisfaction theory.

Very basically; Ransom theory rests on the idea that Adam and Eve sold their descendants into slavery and God needed to buy humanity back (or pay a ransom to) Satan. Thus, the theory supposes that Jesus was engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan and by risking his death overcame Satan by tricking him, thus freeing humanity from its captor. There is also a development of Ransom theory known as Christus Victor, which says that Jesus defeated Satan to gain humanity's freedom, but leaves out the idea that any kind of ransom was paid by Jesus.

We see this most clearly in Eucharist Prayer B;

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy.

Satisfaction theory posits that because God's honor was so stained by human sin, that only the sacrifice of God's own son could 'satisfy' God's demand for justice and restore God's honor. This idea wasn't developed until the middle ages (by Anselm, who was Archbishop of Canterbury in the 12th century). The Protestant reformers developed an understanding of Atonement which was a development of the Satisfaction theory known as the Penal Substitution Theory which says that God's dishonor deserves punishment, specifically punishment of humanity, but that Jesus "substitutes" himself and takes on humanity's punishment himself.

This was the predominant teaching in the Episcopal Church (and almost all Protestant churches) until the 1979 Prayer Book. It is the idea expressed in both Rite 1 prayers and in Prayer A;

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

Moral Influence theory posits that we are saved through the moral improvement of our characters as we take on Christ's teachings and follow the example of his life. The theologian Stephen Morrison says it better than me;

"This theory focuses on not just the death of Jesus Christ, but on His entire life. This sees the saving work of Jesus not only in the event of the crucifixion, but also in all the words He has spoken, and the example He has set. In this theory, the cross is merely a ramification of the moral life of Jesus. He is crucified as a martyr due to the radical nature of His moral example." *Stephen Morrison*

This is the main idea expressed in Prayer C, such as when it says;

Again and again, you called us to return. Through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous Law. And in the fullness of time you sent your only Son, born of a woman, to fulfill your Law, to open for us the way of freedom and peace.

I will say that this is pretty much where I'm at because it is the only theory that suggests Jesus' life is important. I mean, if all Jesus had to do to was die, then the events of Christmas and Epiphany serve no real purpose, and it would have been just as well to allow his death at Herod's hand as a small child. So, clearly, it seems to me, that the life of Jesus matters.

Prayer D, which is based on Eastern forms of Eucharistic Prayers, is rather long and actually touches on both Ransom and Moral Influence, which is actually pretty consistent with the teachings of the very early church.

What this Prayer Book is attempting to do is to open our awareness to the possibilities, but also to guide us in accepting that, on some level, we cannot fully comprehend God's actions and to impress upon us that when we stand before God, we stand in the face of mystery beyond all human understanding.

.....

The Eucharist service is comprised of four parts; Gathering, the Word, the Meal, and the Sending. The Gathering's purpose is to bring the community together and to prepare ourselves for worship. It consists of the prelude, the opening hymn, the Collect for purity and anthem or Gloria where we affirm the glory of God whom we have gathered to worship.

The Word, of course, is focused on the scriptures and our response to them. Christ himself is the logos, Word of God, but in the bible lessons we re-experience the people of God's first encounters with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that we can immerse ourselves in God's presence. By hearing about those first encounters we learn to see the patterns of God's actions. Since God's nature is unchanging, how God responded to the troubles of God's people in the past is likely to be similar to how God responds to our trouble today. The Word section also includes our prayers and confessions as responses to God's presence with us in worship.

The Meal is the natural culmination of our experience of Christ as the Word, and is focused on the Eucharistic prayer and the sacrament of communion. The communion elements of bread and wine are consecrated by the priest who acts as the embodiment of the community's desire to be in Christ's presence. This is why a priest in the Episcopal Church cannot hold Eucharist by themselves - it is a communal action and requires the participation of the community to imbue it with meaning and power. The key acts of the Eucharist are the Institution, the Anamnesis & Oblation, and the Epiclesis. The Institution is where the priest repeats Jesus' words from the last supper naming the bread and wine as his body and blood and that by consuming them in his remembrance, we are somehow joined together both with Christ and with one another.

The Anamnesis and Oblation is the part where we proclaim our commitment to remember the acts of Christ and make explicit our own offering to Christ. Anamnesis and oblation are just the Latin for remembering and offering; which is the usual formula in the eucharistic prayer, such as here in Prayer B;

Therefore, according to his command, O Father,

*We remember his death,
We proclaim his resurrection,
We await his coming in glory;*

*And we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you,
O Lord of all; presenting to you, from your creation, this
bread and this wine.*

The Epiclesis is the invocation of the Holy Spirit to be present in the communion elements for us; i.e., a prayer that the Institution might be made real for us. For example, again from Eucharistic Prayer B;

*We pray you, gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the
Sacrament of the Body of Christ and the Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your Son in
his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

And finally, the service concludes with the Sending. Here, we give thanks for the presence of God in our midst and for the gift of Christ's body and blood as the means by which we are empowered to be the hands, feet and words of God in the world. In some sense, this is the most important part of the service because it is the end to which the whole of worship has been directed (fun fact, the word Mass to describe eucharist comes from the Latin for dismissal) - to go forth into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us.

Book of Common Prayer
Part 12 – Prayers of the People
pp383-395

The rubrics (the rules and directions for worship) in the prayer book say that the community's prayers should address six concerns.

These are:

The Universal Church, its members, and its mission

The Nation and all in authority

The welfare of the world

The concerns of the local community

Those who suffer and those in any trouble

The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

The most important characteristic of these concerns is that they are meant to draw our attention to the world outside of the church. All of Eucharist is drawing us to take our faith out of the doors; compelling us to be the hands and feet and voice of Christ in the world.

The Anglican tradition has incorporated these concerns from the beginning and the prayers used in our Rite I service are little changed from those found in the first prayer book of 1549. However, in the 1979 revision, for the first time, the prayer book did not include an unalterable form but opened up the prayers to any suitable form so long as they address the six concerns above. The prayer book does include six forms of prayer (starting on p. 387) but the revisers made it clear that these were intended as examples and not mandatory forms which must be followed.

Here at St Luke's the Prayers we use were written by me and my colleague, the Rev Lisa Graves.

Book of Common Prayer

Part 13 – Pastoral Offices

pp412-507

The Pastoral offices contain rites for marking important milestones and events in our lives. As such, many people will participate in these rites. There are some lovely prayers sprinkled in, but this isn't a section most would turn to in their daily devotional life. The rites in this section contain liturgies for four this church's sacramental rites, Confirmation, Marriage, Confession, and Anointing of the Sick. There are also rites for Commitment to Christian Service, Thanksgiving for Birth or Adoption, and Burial.

Confirmation – p412

Once upon a time (a time many of you may remember) young children were baptized and then around age twelve they attended confirmation class in preparing for the bishop to lay on hands and only after that, were people allowed to partake of communion. This pattern (baptism, confirmation, communion) which had held up for a long time, began to come undone in the 1960's as many people began to reevaluate church traditions as compared to church teachings.

The catechism in the 1928 prayer book said this; "in baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of God" suggesting that all baptized persons were fully part of Christ's body and thus welcome to participate in communion. The General Convention of 1970 resolved that "children might be admitted to communion before confirmation." In 1971, the House of Bishops stated, "Confirmation should not be regarded as a procedure of admission to the Holy Communion." For many, this relegated confirmation to a lesser status and many describe today as a ritual in search of a meaning.

So where did this rite, Confirmation, come from any way? In the very ancient church, those seeking baptism were primarily adults and they went through a process of initiation called the catechumenate. The catechumenate usually lasted for several years, when those going through it were not even allowed to witness Holy Communion. Then, after their period of preparation was complete, they were baptized and confirmed by the bishop all at once at the Vigil of Easter. It was only as the church grew rapidly after Constantine gave it a favored status in the Roman Empire, that the bishop could no longer personally preside at all baptisms, that baptism and confirmation became separate rites.

So, if Confirmation no longer serves as gateway into Eucharistic participation, what does it mean?

Confirmation symbolizes our connection to the wider church beyond our local congregation. In our tradition, we understand the bishop to be an inheritor of the ministry of the Apostles - we call this the Apostolic Succession - and by laying hands on us at confirmation, each believer is linked by a chain of hands reaching back to Christ's own hands. Our membership and ministry take place in the context of a single faith community - but we are also part of a much bigger movement of Christ's followers across the world and through time.

This rite also contains the forms for people to be received into the Episcopal Church as well as for people recommitting themselves to the life of following Jesus.

A Form of Commitment to Christian Service – p420

This short "rite" consists of only a couple of prayers and is intended to be added to the Eucharist just before the passing of the peace.

The BCP says;

"This form may be used when a person wishes to make or renew a commitment to the service of Christ in the world" – p420

The key phrase here is "in the world." This isn't meant for someone taking up a lay ministry within the church, but rather for someone who wishes to dedicate their vocation outside the church to Christ's service. The compilers of this prayer book imagined that it might be used for say public servants or professionals who want to express their faith within their secular roles.

In truth, I've never seen or heard of it being used. I can imagine that as the religious right grew in prominence at about the same time as the prayer book was approved, what had seemed like a good idea in the idealistic 1960's seemed to be a more questionable one in the 1980's.

Marriage – p422

"Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony...

So opens the marriage service in the first Book of Common Prayer from 1549, and the marriage rite in the 1979 Prayer Book is remarkably similar to that of 1549.

But there was one significant change made in this Prayer Book that sets it apart from all previous editions. Many think that it was the word “obey” that was dropped in the 1979 revision, but that was actually dropped in the 1928 revision, marking the first step towards marriage equality in the Prayer Book. The actual big change was the elimination of the sentence “Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?”¹ The 1979 Prayer Book explicitly affirmed that marriage was the joining of two equal persons.

At the General Convention in 2015, for the first time, two additional marriage rites were approved as “Trial Use Liturgies.” These were adapted from “I Will Bless You and You¹ Will be a Blessing,” which were rites created for blessing same-sex Civil marriages. These new marriage rites were created to offer rites that did not include gendered language that can be used for opposite-sex or same-sex marriages.

But what of marriage itself? How does the church view this? The rite itself includes this description of the origins and purposes of marriage:

“The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.”

“The union... in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.”

However, this view actually represents what was a significant shift in thinking about marriage on the part of the Church (albeit from 1000 years ago). The early church tended to elevate celibacy as the higher spiritual state and did not understand marriage as anything other than a civil contract between families – one whose integrity should be respected, but not a state of grace, as such. As we see in the Bible, marriage there comes in many shapes and forms, including polygamy. St Paul seems to have taken a rather dim view the institution:

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. 1Cor 7:8-9

¹ It is included as an option in the “additional directions” bit at the then end of the section on marriage

And though the Prayer Book explicitly links the gift of marriage to Jesus' presence at the wedding in Cana, it was clearly a Jewish wedding, like any other Jesus might have attended, and the miracle, by its superabundance of wine, is meant to show the disciples that the Messianic time has come and that the setting itself isn't especially important. The great Johannine scholar, Father Raymond Brown emphasizes this, and concludes of the passage: "Neither the external nor the internal evidence for a symbolic reference to matrimony is strong. The wedding is only the backdrop and occasion for the story, and the joining of the man and woman does not have any direct role in the narrative."

Thus, the early church had no specific rite for marriage. This was left up to the secular authorities of the Roman Empire, since marriage was (and largely remains) a legal concern for the legitimacy of heirs. When the Empire became Christian under Constantine, Christian emperors continued the imperial control of marriage, as the Code of Justinian makes clear. When the Empire faltered in the West, church courts took up the role of legal adjudicator of valid marriages just as they took over many other civil administrative functions. But there was still no special religious meaning to the institution.

As the best scholar of sacramental history, Joseph Martos, puts it: "Before the eleventh century there was no such thing as a Christian wedding ceremony in the Latin church, and throughout the Middle Ages there was no single church ritual for solemnizing marriage between Christians." Only in the twelfth century was a claim made for some supernatural favor (grace) bestowed on marriage as a sacrament.

Therefore, though the Church has only recognized marriage as a sacrament, and thus a sign of grace for less than half its life, it seems reasonable to accept that marriage does hold out the promise and possibility of a union between two persons that is reflective of the steadfast love and commitment of God to God's people.

Most of us have, at least, witnessed a wedding or two and are likely familiar with it. The service presupposes that the rite will be taking place within a communal setting (though there is a shorter form intended for other settings). The service proceeds as follows:

- Overview of the church's thoughts on what marriage is
- The consent of both parties is ascertained
- The couple exchanges vows
- The celebrant declares they have married one another
- Prayers are offered for the couple
- The couple is blessed

There are directions for scriptural readings and a celebration of communion. Of course, the most memorable part, the kiss, is not mentioned anywhere in the rite.

This section also offers a short service to bless a marriage that was conducted at a civil service (like by a judge or sea captain).

A Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child p439

This rite replaces the rite from previous prayerbooks which was called The Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth (commonly called the Churching of Women). That previous rite had been relatively unchanged from the first BCP of 1549, where it was titled, The Purification of Women. It was essentially a rite to “purify” a new mother after childbirth, which seems to imply a view that childbirth itself is somehow defiling. It also did not mention the child at all. This rite was a continuation of earlier practices which had been common throughout the church since the very beginning and was probably a continuation of even earlier Judean practices, since under Mosaic Law, childbirth (and menstruation) were deemed ritually impure (because of the blood).

This rite rejects that view and is instead focused on the presence of the child and family (not just the mother), whether the child enters into the family through birth or adoption. The penitential character of the old rite laid aside for a character of Thanksgiving.

Reconciliation of a Penitent (aka Confession) p446

It seems as though all societies throughout history have developed means by which people whose actions are deemed beyond the boundaries of communal acceptance could be expelled from the community. But just as cultures develop means to expel the violators of communal standards, there are also corresponding means by which they might be re-welcomed into the community. Ancient Judaism is no exception, and those who violated the Mosaic Law were considered as impure, but the Law also provided means of restoration for those who seriously desired to make amends.

Since the earliest Christians were also Judeans, they brought these ideas and rituals into their new way of relating to God through Christ. As Jesus says in Luke’s Gospel; *Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Luke 15:7*

In the very early church, this process of expulsion and re-welcoming came to be known as Penance. Penance consisted of three parts, the expulsion from community (excommunication), the assignment and completion of making amends (penitence) and

the welcoming back into community (absolution). And all of these were meant to happen publicly, the early church did not practice private Penance.

It was in Celtic Britain that private Penance emerged between the sixth and ninth centuries, where public penance was preserved for actions which brought disrepute on the church and private penance for matters of conscience. However, by the eleventh century, public penance had pretty much disappeared outside of Lent. Private Penance, however, really took off and became a yearly requirement for all Christians.

During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, Protestants sought to reemphasize public penance and did so by introducing a corporate confession as part of the Eucharistic service on Sundays. But private Penance did not go away and continues in our current Prayer Book as the rite for Reconciliation of a Penitent.

Thus, personal confession is a sacrament in the Episcopal Church, but unlike some churches, it is not an expectation or requirement for members. The oft stated approach of the Episcopal Church to personal Penance is; "all may, some should, none must."

Our rite has two forms, and in each the penitent is invited to offer up their sins to God and then the priest is directed to "offer counsel, direction and comfort" prior to pronouncing absolution. The rite is designed to treat the penitent with grace rather than judgement.

The Episcopal rite does not lay out specific forms of penitence for sins confessed. It is our understanding that grace cannot be earned through our actions, but is a gift freely given of God to all who truly turn to God. There also isn't a hierarchy of sins, where some are worse than others, but all sins are equally offensive to God and damaging to our relationship with God, but Christ's actions upon the Cross atoned for all our sins and provides equal absolution for all.

Whether or not you decide to ever participate in the sacramental rite, I would suggest confession be a part of your regular prayer practice. An important, but often overlooked, aspect of following Jesus is the necessity of being honest with ourselves. Honesty about the world we live in, and especially honesty about ourselves and the choices we make (and their motivations).

Confession then, is an opportunity to lower our guard a bit in our relationship with God, allow ourselves a little vulnerability, and be perfectly honest about who we are. Not the person we aspire to be, or the one we try to convince others we are, but the for-real messy person we are when no one is looking.

I am convinced that this is what Jesus is talking about when he commands his followers to pray “in secret.”

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your room. And shutting your door, pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.”

Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 6, verses 5-6, NRSV

It is difficult, oftentimes, to honestly assess ourselves, but it is important that we make the effort. God already knows your heart and actions. Confession (and prayer generally) isn’t for God’s benefit at all; but for ours. Following Jesus means no longer following ourselves; it means taking ourselves out of the center of our lives and our thinking and placing God there because that is way more realistic than thinking you’re the star of the world.

Ministration to the Sick p453

There are really three parts to this section. The first is a small rite intended to be said by a priest or healing minister when visiting with someone who is ill. This first section is a kind of mini liturgy that has options for prayers, scripture readings, anointing and even communion. The second section has prayers to be said on behalf of those who are ill, and the third has prayers for people who are sick to say.

The first section is usually used in private situations with only two or three present, such as at a bedside. However, the rubrics suggest it could be incorporated into a Sunday or other public worship service.

Technically, the anointing is considered a blessing and, in our tradition, is usually reserved for priests, however, the prayer book allows for it to be done by anyone “in cases of necessity.” Personally, I think that if you feel called to a ministry of healing then whenever you practice such ministry, it is of necessity. The oil of anointing itself is usually just olive oil with a fragrance (often frankincense) added in.

The second section contains a number of prayers that can offered for those who are ill and they are pretty comprehensive; covering all of the basics, including prayers for; general sickness, recovery from illness, sick children, before an operation, strength and confidence, health generally, doctors and nurses, and one of thanksgiving for recovery.

The third section of prayers for those suffering an illness is a bit shorter but has prayers for trusting God, pain, sleep, and perseverance (titled In the Morning).

These two sections of prayers, especially, the prayers on behalf of those who are ill, are great resources for our individual prayer practices, especially when we just don't know ourselves what to say.

Ministration at the Time of Death (aka Last Rites) p462

Like Ministration for the Sick, this "rite" is actually three different things, all related to death. The first is the actual "last rite" which is essentially a litany, which can be done responsively with those gathered around the dying person with the Lord's prayer and then a commendatory prayer to be used once the person has died.

Next there is another litany intended to be used prior to the funeral or wake, usually for the family.

And lastly there are prayers to be offered when the remains come to the church. This section is titled Reception of the Body, though since it was first published, the vast majorities of funeral these days are with cremated remains and not whole bodies.

Burial of the Dead p469

I am Resurrection and I am Life says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he die. And everyone who has life, and has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die forever.

These words of Jesus taken from the eleventh chapter of John's gospel have been the opening words of the funeral service since the very first Prayer Book of 1549. In this opening we see that the theme of remembering the dead is a remembrance of the promise of abundant life through the power of Jesus' resurrection. The funeral service is, in fact, an Easter Service.

Though our modern culture is reluctant to face death, with many modern funerals being instead "Celebrations of Life," the Prayer Book service remains a straightforward and classically Christian response to the reality of our mortality. Life in Christ is not insurance against suffering or death; it is instead a response to God's promise to be with us, and sustain us through all our travails as evidenced in Christ's Resurrection. This is wonderfully captured in the service during the Commendation when the Presider says;

Thou only art immortal, the creator and maker of mankind;

and we are mortal, formed of the earth, and unto earth shall we return. For so thou didst ordain when thou createst me, saying, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." All we go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The service itself is in three main parts, there is the Liturgy of the Word, with an optional Eucharist, the Commendation and the Committal.

The Liturgy of the Word begins with the Procession, where traditionally the body was brought into the church, though oftentimes now, the remains are already in the church for the visitation time with the family. This is followed by prayers for the deceased and for their families and loved ones left behind. This Prayer Book continues to offer separate prayers for deceased adults and deceased children, a feature first introduced in the previous edition of 1928. The prayers are followed by readings from Scripture. This Prayer book suggests an Old Testament Reading, a New Testament Reading and a Gospel reading. Previous Prayer books did not have an Old Testament reading. The service then offers as options a sermon and the Apostles' Creed, followed by a special form of the Prayers of the People. There then follows a Eucharist, which, again, is optional. Like the kiss in the marriage ceremony, the prayer book does not mention eulogies and I believe there are parishes where they are not allowed, just as there are parishes that don't allow flowers, all for reasons that aren't clear to me.

The Commendation serves as the bridge between the service in the church and the service at the graveside. Its supplicatory prayers ask (or commend) God to receive the deceased into God's care. It finishes with a procession following the deceased out of the church.

The Committal is the graveside service in which the remains of the deceased are committed or interred into their resting place to await Christ's return. It is here that probably the most well-known words of the funeral service are said;

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother N., and we commit his body to the ground; * earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless him and keep him, the Lord make his face to shine upon him and be gracious to him, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him and give him peace. Amen.

Like the Daily Offices and Eucharist, there is a service in “traditional” language and one in contemporary vernacular, Burial I and Burial II, respectively. Other than language though, the services are quite similar.

In many ways, the funeral service is one of the most touching and beautiful of all the rites of the Prayer Book. In it we are reminded of our mortality and yet brought ‘round again to confront the enormity of God’s love for us and the promise that death will not have the final say in our lives; rather it is God’s word of life that is the final pronouncement on our existence.