

This Do in Remembrance of Me

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[0 : 00] And let me pray for us as we come to God's word in the sermon today. Blessed Lord, which has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

March the 21st, two days away from now, but in 1556 in Oxford in England was apparently cold and wet. But like Melbourne's sporting crowds, it doesn't deter them.

They were there in number. At St. Mary's Church, still a church you can visit in Oxford and climb to the top of its tower for I think the best view in Oxford that you'll get. And they went there to hear a sermon preached by an acceptable so-called minister and then to hear an apparent confession by the heretic who was about to be put to death.

But his confession was not so much a confession, but rather a statement of upholding the truth of what he was actually on trial for. Then that person was taken outside, tied and manacled to a stake. The wood set a fire and he was burned to death mercifully quickly. Thomas Cranmer was the person put to death and he was the highest profile martyr or one executed in the reign of Mary, the first of England.

[1 : 47] The highest profile criminal really in the country. For he was the Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest minister in the Church of England. Even today the highest minister of the Anglican Church around the world is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

So it really was a celebrity type of execution, though it was fairly gruesome. Cranmer was a gentle and godly man and a very scholarly man.

He was born in 1489 in Nottinghamshire and when he was 13 or 14 went up to Cambridge to study, which was not unusually young because in those days often Cambridge was sort of a bit like a high school as much as a university.

And he studied there through his teenage years and he came under the influence of a great Renaissance scholar called Erasmus who directed people to study the original languages and so he studied Greek and Hebrew as the original languages of the scriptures, something that was only just beginning to be done in the 16th century in Europe and just then in England.

Being a great scholar, one of the things that appeals to me about Cranmer is that he built up a substantial library that was apparently bigger than the theological library of Cambridge University, something that attracts me no end to Cranmer, let me tell you.

[3 : 08] He became a lecturer at the university. In 1523 he was ordained. He went on and did a doctorate of divinity and was remained as a lecturer and fellow there. But in 1529 when he was 40, a plague hit Cambridge.

And so he, along with many inhabitants of Cambridge, left. And he was sort of evacuated, I suppose, to a wealthy mansion in Essex where, as it happened, while he was staying there, the landlord of that mansion entertained the king, Henry VIII.

And Henry VIII at this time was still married to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, but didn't want to be and was trying to work out how to end the marriage.

And that, of course, involved a significant dispute with Rome because the Rome and the Catholic Church and the Pope didn't allow divorce.

And Cranmer, as it happened, offered some advice at this chance meeting at this house in Essex, along the lines, I gather, that because Henry's first wife was actually the wife of his brother, but the brother died, technically that marriage should be annulled and not counted as a marriage.

[4 : 26] And in a sense that became part of the argument leading to the eventual divorce of Henry VIII from his first wife in order to marry Anne Boleyn. Now, I'm sure Henry's motives were not particularly pure and good in wanting a divorce from his first wife.

But Cranmer was personally theologically committed by this stage to the ending of papal authority over the church in England. Not because it was a racial issue of getting rid of the Italians from ruling the church, but rather because as he'd studied the scriptures, he realized how wrong the papal rule was over the church and how many wrong practices it supported and how false it was.

Well, in 1532, three years later, Henry VIII needed an Archbishop of Canterbury and he plucked from quite obscurity, really, Thomas Cranmer to be that person.

He accepted it very unwillingly, but largely because he had a very high view of, in a sense, the royal authority over the land and felt that he ought not to refuse the invitation or strong invitation of the king.

That he survived the following 15 years of Henry's rule as Archbishop of Canterbury is no mean feat. He didn't have to be a wife to know that it was dangerous to be in the company of Henry sometimes.

[5 : 46] There were many chancellors and senior ministers who lost their lives and positions during Henry's reign. But Thomas Cranmer survived those remaining 15 years of Henry's rule and then survived through the six years of Edward VI into the reign of Mary I of England.

In order to understand the significance of Thomas Cranmer and what he stood for, we need to appreciate that in those days, the Roman Catholic, or just Catholic Church as it was called then, was largely corrupt, full of superstition, and full of ignorance by both its lay people and clergy.

Most clergy could not recite the Ten Commandments, although that may be something that's still the case today. I'm not quite sure about that. For them, the Bible was in Latin only.

It was forbidden to be in English. And that meant that few clergy and even fewer lay people actually understood anything of the Bible at all. Money was demanded to lessen your time in purgatory, a non-biblical idea of where the dead go before they may go to heaven.

And money was demanded for all sorts of other reasons that would give you time off in purgatory or rewards in heaven, a fairly corrupt sort of financial system. Many clergy didn't speak English, and many bishops and clergy of senior posts were actually sort of friends of the Pope in Rome, and some of them never even visited England, but certainly were happy to receive the income from the positions that they held.

[7 : 22] From his conviction of biblical truth, from his study of the scriptures in their original languages, Cranmer sought to reform the church. He was a cautious and careful person, and some of his detractors to this day think that he ought to have done more by way of reform.

But on the other hand, he was restrained by Henry VIII, who was never particularly fully embracing Protestant reform of the church. So much of Cranmer's reform over the 21 or two years that he was effectively Archbishop of Canterbury came gradually, partly as he himself grew in his convictions, partly as he only gradually had opportunity for some reform.

Some of the measures in Henry's day that Thomas Cranmer was involved in were these. He gradually introduced some English in the services, so the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments in English were gradually introduced in some places.

He was instrumental in 1536, writing up what are called the Six Articles of Faith as an attempt to give a theological coherence and foundation to the Church of England.

They're fairly compromised in that they're still fairly Catholic in their view, probably reflecting Cranmer's caution in taking steps to make it more biblical. Certainly later on, after Henry had died and in Edward's reign, he drew up the 42 Articles of Faith and they've been changed in Elizabeth's reign after Cranmer's life to the 39 Articles, which still today are supposed to be a summary of Christian faith for the Church of England or Anglican Church.

[9 : 05] In the back of our own prayer books, you can still find the 39 Articles. Perhaps his biggest move in Henry's reign was in 1537, he succeeded in having an English Bible placed in every parish church in England.

Now we might think that that's commonplace. We have Bibles in our pews. If you're like me, you've probably got four or five different versions of the Bible in English at home. But up to this point, it was forbidden to have a Bible in English.

It was only, I think, 11 years before this, in 1526, that William Tyndale, the great translator of all the New Testament into English and much of the old, was executed in Holland, partly betrayed by some of the English leaders.

He was certainly not welcome back in England in 1526, and yet just 11 years later, Cranmer had succeeded in persuading the king to allow an English Bible to be in every church.

An astonishing achievement in one sense, one that we probably just take for granted. But the purpose, of course, was that people should be able to read God's word in their own language.

[10:14] Well, Henry died in 1547, and he was succeeded by his son Edward, Edward VI, who though really just a boy and teenager during his short six years reign, throughout which he was fairly much in ill health, it seems that he was a young man who had personally convictions of the Protestant and biblical Christian faith.

And so though he was governed by men of some ill repute in some ways, the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland, who were not particularly generous and gracious, but were ardent reformers, it certainly gave Thomas Cranmer, as Archbishop of Canterbury, much freer reign in bringing about reform in the country.

Cranmer's greatest skill, probably, is that he was a great liturgist, that is, the writer of services and prayers for congregational use.

He was the one who basically wrote the morning prayer and evening prayer service, which has come down to us in largely his form to this day in the front of our prayer books, and that was quite a novelty in a way because those services are so thoroughly biblical with readings from Old and New Testament and Gospels, the aim being that if you said morning and evening prayer every day of a year, you would read through the whole Bible in a year, and the canticles or words that would be said together are from biblical passages, things like the Song of Mary and so on.

So we still have the benefit of some of that in the morning and evening prayer services in our prayer books. He was a great writer of prayers that are called the Collects, a prayer each week that would be said, as Megan has read the Collect for the third Sunday of Lent, and the one that I read at the beginning of this sermon about read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the scriptures is the collect that Thomas Cranmer wrote for the second Sunday of Advent.

[12:16] Listen to this one that he wrote for the first Sunday in Advent. Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light now in the time of this mortal life in the which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost now and forever.

Amen. Well, Cranmer was great at writing those collects that appeal to something of the character of God, lift out the truths of the scripture readings for the day, and then pray them and apply them in people's lives.

That was, again, fairly novel in his day. He was a master of what we call common prayer. We know the phrase, the book of common prayer, but the idea is that common prayer is the prayer of the people.

So it's not just the priest up front reciting things that are incomprehensible in a foreign language, but rather the prayers of the people said, some of them together, as we indeed do in an Anglican tradition, something that I think is indeed still one of the great strengths of the Anglican liturgy and Anglican service.

But perhaps the highlight of Cranmer's legacy is the service of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Up until Cranmer's time, that service was called the Mass.

[13:48] It was in Latin. It was not understood by most people, I would gather. People would only take bread or actually a wafer, part of a wafer, rather than both bread and wine.

The priest would have the wine, but not the people. The Mass was regarded as a sacrifice of Christ again by the priest for the people to God, rather than a remembrance of what Jesus has done.

Hence, the place where the Mass would be conducted is called an altar, a place of sacrifice. And the priest normally would stand with his back to the people as he was offering a sacrifice to God on their behalf.

The theology behind the bread and the wine is that it is transubstantiated. That is, it changes its substance so that when the people receive a bit of the wafer or the priest drinks the wine, it's actually not wine or bread.

It has become literally, physically, substantially, the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. That bread and wine after the prayer of consecration is often revered and adored and perhaps kept for special purposes and so on.

[15:09] That Catholic theology of transubstantiation comes from a rather odd and literalistic interpretation of words of Jesus recorded in Mark's gospel as we heard it read and the other gospels and 1 Corinthians as well of the account of the Last Supper where Jesus says, take and eat this, this is my body.

Well, there is Jesus, physical, his body, sitting there, offering what looks to be a piece of bread to his disciples the night before he died, saying, this is my body.

It's not literally his body, it's bread. He's using a metaphor, an illustration, to say, this is something that's to be done in remembrance of my body and my blood, given, shed for you on the cross, which will happen the next day.

Just like when Jesus says, I'm the good shepherd or I'm the gate to the sheepfold, he's not saying literally I'm a gate, he's still a person. He's using metaphors to describe what he's on about.

But the idea of transubstantiation comes basically from a literalistic interpretation of this is my body. Well, Cranmer's writing of the Lord's Supper changes it significantly in all sorts of different ways, only some of which I'll mention here, apart from the fact that it's in English so that people could understand it.

[16:33] He borrows or uses substantially the four accounts in the Gospel, in the New Testament, of the Last Supper of Jesus the night before he died, from Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospel and from 1 Corinthians 11.

Only Luke and 1 Corinthians use the expression, do this in remembrance of me, but that's part of the liturgy that Cranmer wrote. As a preface to that communion, and we will come to this later in our service today, he used some of the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 about self-examination so that you eat and drink worthily and have prepared yourself properly to receive communion.

That's a new insertion or emphasis compared to the Latin Mass of his day. The focus is on remembrance. It's not a re-sacrifice, but it's a remembrance of a sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross on the first Good Friday.

So the Thanksgiving prayer is not a prayer of consecration to change bread and wine into something else. It's a prayer of thanksgiving for that sacrifice. And much of those words, as most of you know them fairly well, actually recite the story that we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians about the night before he died, Jesus took bread and gave it to his disciples and the words that he said and so on.

That is, we remember that event because Cranmer's written it out for us in the Thanksgiving prayer. He insisted that there be a sermon because there was not always a sermon in the Latin Mass.

[18:10] Fairly rarely, I gather. He insisted that there would be a sermon because the Lord's Supper is not something to be separated from the ministry of God's word. The emphasis throughout is on the death of Jesus at Calvary on the cross, that one true sacrifice for sin.

And that's why in the old form, as we'll see again later today, it has that very clear emphasis about the one true sacrifice for sin. We're not offering another sacrifice.

That one is sufficient, but we are remembering it and the benefits that are ours from it. So there's no offertory of bread and wine as though we're offering something to God as was in the Latin Mass.

Very clearly, the Anglican Church is supposed to call this thing here a table, not an altar. It is the holy table or a communion table. I actually object to people who call it an altar, although there are people who still do that.

It's a table. Ideally, it's to be, in a sense, in the midst of people so that the priest does not stand with his back to people, but in our case, standing behind it to face the people so there's a sense of gathering around the table for a meal, not a sacrifice.

[19:23] Not always was that possible in the old church where the tables or what used to be called altars were against the wall so the priests would stand in the Protestant tradition on the side of the table so they don't have the back to the people.

and so that it takes away the sacrificial idea. Likewise, Cranmer insisted that for the Reformed Church of England, the priests or ministers would not wear the vestments of the Latin church that were sacrificial-type vestments and rather would wear the sort of robes that have just a plain white surplice and a preaching scarf but not the sacrificial vestments.

All the people were to take the bread and the wine. The bread should be normal or pure wheat bread. You can actually see that rubric in the handout that was given to you today as well. And because it doesn't change into the body and blood of Christ, the curate can take home whatever's left over for personal use. Curate in that language probably means minister in general, not just vicar or curate in effect.

There's to be no adoration of it. The bread and the wine remains bread and wine. And so if you later on read part of the italics in the handout that's in the notice sheet, you'll see that though Cranmer suggested that people kneel to receive communion, there was actually a lot of debate amongst the Reformers about that and some thought that people should stand and not kneel, he makes it clear that if you're kneeling, you're not revering or adoring this.

[20 : 49] It's not an act of adoration but an act of humility if you are kneeling to take communion. The focus is on Jesus not in the bread and the wine but in heaven. So you lift up your hearts to heaven and there's an anticipation in the Lord's Supper that this meal, whilst it commemorates and remembers Jesus' death on the cross, it's a foretaste of being in heaven where Jesus now is, gathered around his heavenly throne at the banquet feast of the Lamb.

So some of the language of acclamation that is used anticipates that heavenly experience that awaits us. The words of administration of giving the bread and giving the wine are much more biblical in their orientation and of course he refused to use the name Mass but much preferred the name Lord's Supper, the best name I think for the meal.

Cranmer was not an extreme Reformer and there was debate about the Lord's Supper amongst the Reformers and about the nature of bread and wine and what spiritual benefit is there.

Is it simply just remembering? That was what a Swiss Reformer called Zwingli argued. All it is, is we remember. Well Cranmer thought it's a bit more than that. That is, the key point is that we receive in faith the bread and the wine as the body and blood of Christ.

Still remains bread and wine as we digest it and so on. But in receiving in faith then we spiritually feed on Jesus Christ and his death for us.

[22 : 25] That is, we receive again benefit of Jesus' death. It's not just remembering. There's a bit more to it than that. And so the high point is receiving. It's why in his Thanksgiving prayer he didn't have Amen at the end.

Because in a sense the prayer leads into the reception of the bread and wine and that's the high point. And so that's worth remembering as well I think. Because I think there there's a healthy and right biblical theology.

Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 11 that if you don't receive rightly and in faith then you eat and drink damnation on yourself in effect. So the opposite of that is that we actually receive spiritual benefit when we do eat and drink in faith.

So all of that should make us take the Lord's Supper seriously but certainly not to regard it in any way as a superstition or a magic ritual. Well it was in essence for that view of the Lord's Supper that Cranmer was put to death.

It's amazing really because in our society who would care? I mean whether my view is right or wrong in a sense or your view is right or wrong I mean you can't imagine the Prime Minister of our country throwing people into prison for their views of the Lord's Supper.

[23 : 40] But it was a highly contentious issue back in Cranmer's Day and it's not unimportant either. Edward VI died in 1553 and was succeeded by his older sister Mary.

Mary was Henry VIII's first child to live and she was staunchly and vehemently Catholic. And she's often nicknamed Bloody Mary because of so many hundreds literally of people who were put to death in her reign simply for being biblical or Protestant as it was called of their faith and not Catholic.

And the most high profile martyr of those years those five years was Thomas Cranmer. Sadly it seems to me that much of what Cranmer actually died for has been lost or confused in modern Anglican churches.

His liturgy is largely kept for us in the Book of Common Prayer 1662 110 years after he originally wrote it in 1552 in Edward's day. But in some of the modern liturgy it seems to me that it's crept in the wearing of vestments the calling of an altar the offering of bread and wine as though somehow we're offering something to God in a re-sacrifice the view that the bread and wine significantly changes after the Thanksgiving prayer so that if any is left over it has to be consumed by the priest in church or locked up in a little box in a wall in a church or something like that sometimes it's

