

## **A Reflection from our Rector, The Rev. Ben Robertson**

Wednesday, August 16, 2023

A friend of mine is a former Episcopalian. Shocking, I know. Despite my best efforts, they are an active member of another tradition where they engage in ministries that meet the needs of the world while being fed by the Word of God. Such a pity. And when they left the Episcopal Church, they offered a few bits of criticism that I have heard many times before: they were no longer moved by the Anglican tradition of worship, especially the use of the same or similar prayers and texts week after week.

And such critique is not devoid of merit. We Episcopalians (especially the clergy!) can run on autopilot. Sometimes we create worship that newcomers find difficult. And new or nontraditional prayers - extemporaneous or otherwise - can be breathtaking. Those of us up front should have the courage to listen and engage.

However, I am also reminded of a mentor of mine who once took a youth group on a mission trip. The mission was an ecumenical endeavor and there were multiple youth groups participating from a variety of churches. Every night, they would gather in a circle and say grace before supper. And every night, each group's leader was invited to offer a blessing. These multiple blessings created an unofficial competition between the leaders - a pray-off of sorts - each one attempting to pray longer and more evocatively than the other. Except my mentor, who stepped forward, opened her Book of Common Prayer, shared a collect, and that was that. When they all finally processed into the dining hall, a member of their group whispered, "I've never been prouder to be an Episcopalian."

For our prayers, when we engage with them fully and soulfully, are written on our hearts. They may be memorized, but the recitation brings comfort and evokes generational memory. I believe the Spirit speaks to us in the words themselves as well as between the lines. And the history and poetry of our sacred words can speak to those who yearn for a tradition that is ancient and rooted. For these, and so many other reasons, I remain an Episcopalian. And as our society become more disjointed, more technological, and more trivial, I believe our tradition has something to say.