

Viewpoint: What it Means to Us to be Anglican

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We were both raised in the Episcopal Church, and so part of what it means to us to be Anglican is to be people who can travel almost anywhere in the globe and find themselves immediately “at home” when they walk into an Anglican church. Other Christian churches might feel like the house of a dear relative, but it is this one that is home. But we are also people who, as adults, have chosen this path for very particular reasons.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30). In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the very embodiment of the Jewish Torah – the Law. Yet, his interpretation and practice of the Law prioritizes its “weightier” matters, such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness, without completely disregarding all its other requirements: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others” (Matt 23:23).

Oddly enough, it is the “weightier” load, the yoke of justice and mercy and faithfulness, that Jesus says is the easier one to bear. This is the yoke that enlivens us even as we serve. An important aspect of what we value about the Anglican tradition is that it follows Jesus’ own method of biblical interpretation: being Anglican means being part of a Christian tradition that prioritizes these “weightier” matters of scripture without disregarding its other aspects.

We are both Anglicans whose particular vocation is to study and teach the New Testament and Christian Origins, so we are keenly aware from our work that the variety we know in the church right now pales before the variety known in the church’s first 200 years. Some of that diversity is evident in the pages of the New Testament – which had not yet become sacred scripture. And yet those first two centuries were also years of tremendous growth and spiritual vitality for the church. As a tradition, Anglicanism has been committed to “catholicity,” or “universality,” the broadest possible understanding of the church, which includes the historical traditions and documents of the church over the centuries. But Anglican tradition is also committed to its own particular character as “reformed,” emphasizing the priority of the Scriptures over all the church’s subsequent traditions.

As Jesus and Paul and Matthew and John and Luke and Mark demonstrated in their own interpretations of the Jewish Scriptures, the inspired witness of faith intersects dynamically with the various contexts and locations of the people of God. Not every Christian community is a cookie-cutter image of every other, nor should we expect them to be, when Scripture prevails. Faithfulness, mercy, and justice take on the shapes and

hues of the people who incarnate them in their own situations. What being Anglican means to us is a commitment to learning the Scriptures well, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and then living them out in the contexts of our own particular neighborhoods. The goodness of the Anglican path is that this home of ours has, as Jesus said to Thomas, “many rooms” (John 14:2). It is in this many-roomed mansion of the Anglican expression of Christianity that we continue to find Christ revealed, just as he promised.

In addition to being co-directors of The WorkShop, Lewis and Patterson also are both on staff at St. Mark’s, San Antonio.