

Grace-filled Voices

March 17, 2015

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr, 1556

By Ann Fox

“Name him, Christians, name him,
with love strong as death,
Name with awe and wonder and with bated breath;
He is God the Savior, he is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshiped, trusted, and adored.” (1)

On Saturday, March 21, in our church calendar, we commemorate the 459th anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, one of my favorite Anglican heroes. If he had done only one thing in his life, composing the treasure trove of our beloved prayers and collects which we use every Sunday in our worship services, that would have been memorable enough. But as Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII, Cranmer was there at the very beginning with his hands in everything! He was the one who, with Thomas Cromwell, Henry's Lord Great Chamberlain, assisted Henry in finding a Scriptural “excuse” to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to provide a male heir. Cranmer was the one who officiated at the wedding of Henry and his new wife, Anne Boleyn, and established King Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, thereby thumbing the noses of the English monarchy at the Pope and the rest of the Roman Catholic world. But before that tumultuous birth of our Anglican Church could happen, the rumblings in Europe against the abuses and wrong teachings in the Roman Catholic Church were coming to a head. The controversial ideas of Martin Luther and others, especially about salvation by faith alone, gave new voice for the dissenting clergy, and Cranmer, who was sent to Germany to study, was in the thick of them, absorbing, studying, learning. His own “doctrine of the grateful heart” (2) was nurtured in Germany, and brought home to adorn and enrich a new liturgy for a new

church.

Thomas Cranmer created, by his own composition as well as translating from Latin, our very first Book of Common Prayer (1549), much of which is still recognizable in today's liturgy. He desired one common liturgy for all English-speaking people in the world to be able to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” (3) God's word for themselves for the first time in history. The English Reformation was in full swing.

I admire Thomas Cranmer even though he was not perfect. His passion for the truth of Scripture and the authority of God, the power of his faith, his great courage against tremendous obstacles, and his deep love of our Lord Jesus Christ trumps all the political maneuvering, marital secrets, warring against the Pope and the traditions of Roman Catholicism. His life ultimately trumps our fear of death itself. Like Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested, he lived in extremely dangerous times, and, like Peter, he still loved Jesus, and did not forsake Him.

After Henry's death, his daughter “Bloody Mary” Tudor's reign of terror tried to recapture and force the return of the Roman Catholic Church to power in England. In fear of his life, Cranmer weakened and vacillated, finally recanting his belief in the truth of the Scriptural doctrine that he had promoted as a Protestant. That sin rent his heart in two, but Mary remained unyielding and suspicious; she demanded that Cranmer pay for his treason against her and his heresy against the Roman Church with his life, by burning at the stake.

In his darkest moments in prison, Thomas Cranmer must have begun to feel the power of the Holy Spirit upon him, lifting him back into the light

and glory of a heart held fast in union with the grace of God: "Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; Save Your servant who trusts in You!" (Psalm 86: 2) as David's plea must have echoed in his own heart. For certain it is that Cranmer's love for Jesus was "strong as death," and in the end he went willingly, for he knew who his God was, and did not hesitate to stand at the last day when from his flesh he should see God and not another. (Job 19: 25-27).

As the fire began to pick at his feet, he thrust his "heretic" hand directly into the flames, holding it there to punish first that part of his body most detested by him because it had betrayed his Lord Christ who dwelt in his own heart. Out of the abundance of that heart, his mouth spoke (Matthew 12: 34): "This hand hath offended.' As soon as the fire got up, he was very soon dead, never stirring or crying all the while...." (4).

Not many of us will ever have the opportunity, desire, or ability to become a martyr. But how much do you love Jesus? Are you able to love Him, proclaim Him, name Him with a love strong as death? As we approach the season of Christ's Passion, I ask, how passionate are we for Jesus? Can we denounce fear and self-interest --the world, the flesh and the devil---enough to thrust our hand into the flames for Jesus? Is our faith so steadfast that we shall never wave palms and proclaim the victory of our King Jesus with one breath and, with the next, lash out with outraged voices, "Crucify him?" Or can we meet Him in the Garden and whisper, "Yes, Lord, I *will* stay awake, I *will* stay with you, and I *will* love you unto death?"

I would like to be able to say, in the Gethsemane of my life, that yes, my faith *is* rock-strong. My

love for my God and Savior *is* strong as death, that dying for my Jesus (whether that would ever come to pass or not) contains no fear for me, because He drank that cup for *me*, He sweated that blood for *me*, He died that excruciating death for *me*, and *my* hand, offensive as it is in the wretched blackness of my guilt, should be the first one nailed to that cross!

Let us name Him with love strong as death, as Cranmer did. It is the death that breaks the gates of heaven open for us. It cleanses that wretched blackness with His blood, it binds up all of our sorrows, and heals the bitter embers of our hearts. Then we, like Thomas Cranmer, will find in Him alone the sweet blessing of "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25: 21)

--Ann Fox

Sources:

The Hymnal 1982. New York, NY: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985. Hymn 435, "At the Name of Jesus," 1870. Text, Caroline Maria Noel. Music, *King's Weston*, Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Davis, Bud, PhD. Celebrate Anglicanism. Long Beach, CA: Diocese of Western Anglicans, 2012. p. 52.

1928 Book of Common Prayer, Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, p. 92.

Anonymous. "Archbishop Thomas Cranmer Execution Account, By an Anonymous Bystander." "Tudor England Primary Sources." N.p., 1556. *English History.net*. <<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/primary.html>> Accessed 3 Feb 2015.

Don't Forget to sign up for the Stand Up For Kids Meal to be served on Wednesday, March 25th. There is a list of what is needed available on the Welcome Table. Please contribute one of the items or money for this ministry of helps to feed homeless teens.

Saturday Morning, February 28 at 9:30 a.m.
Join us for the
Hour of Power Prayer
in the Sanctuary
Come pray for the church, our communities
and the world.

This Week at Grace

March 17, 2015—March 24, 2015

Tues. March 17, 2015

11:30 a.m. Bible Study
6:30 p.m. Lenten Soup Supper
7:00 p.m. Lenten Teaching
Fr. Joe Rees—Prayer & Being Sent Out Two by Two (Will be repeated on Wednesday at 2:00 p.m.)

Wed. March 18,

9:00 a.m. Stewardship Committee
10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist Service
2:00 p.m. Lenten Teaching
3:30 p.m. No Staff Meeting

Thurs. March 19

7:00 a.m. Bible Study
10:30 a.m. Sr. Women's Bible Study
4:00 p.m. Choir Rehearsal

Fri. March 20

Fr. Joe's Day off
6:30 p.m. Evening Prayer & Healing & Stations of the Cross

Sat. March 21

8:00 a.m. Men's Fellowship

Sun. March 22

Fifth Sunday in Lent

7:30 a.m. Spoken Eucharist Service
9:15 a.m. Nursery opens
9:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist Service
9:30 a.m. Children's Church
11:15 a.m. Coffee & Fellowship

Mon. March 23

Bishop Keith Andrews will be with us on April 26th for his first official visit to our congregation as Bishop. If you would like to be confirmed, reaffirmed, received or baptized by the Bishop, please contact the church office. To be confirmed, you will need some education so please let us know right away so we can set up the proper classes.

Sunday Servers

March 22, 2015	5th Sunday in Lent	9:30 a.m. Service
First Reader	Jeremiah 31:31-34	Myrna Lipnicke
Psalm Reader	Psalm 51:1-16	John Lipnicke
Second Reader	Hebrews 5:1-10	Dick Sholly
Intercessor/Acolyte		Joy Rosendale, Kalani Clifford, Kai Clifford
Lay Euch. Ministers		Dick Phelps, Trish Stewart
Sub-Deacon		Kay Focke
Early Intercessors		Thor Strom, Richard Rieder
Welcomers		Paula Sholly, Myrna Lipnicke
Ushers		Dick Sholly, Ray Seibold
Vestry Person of Day		Ann Fox
Healing Ministers		Kay & Alfred Focke
Counters		Cline Handy, Helen Reid