
From England To America: Come And Have Breakfast

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Somewhere back in my own ancestral lore is the story of Lieutenant William Candler, who fought with Oliver Cromwell in the English Civil War. As a reward for that service, William Candler is said to have received land in Ireland. That could well have been the end of the story; so the loyal soldier lived happily ever after. But the story continues, like all families continue.

In order to have fought with Cromwell, Candler, we must presume, was a strong Protestant. But having taken up residence in Ireland, it was either he, or his son (another William Candler?) who fell in love with an Irish woman. That woman was definitely Roman Catholic. Divisions between Catholics and Protestants were so fierce that the young couple was forced to flee to the American colonies. In my own family story, that's how at least two of my ancestors got to America.

I told this story last Sunday as I preached. However, I was preaching not in my own church, but in the delightful parish of St. Mary's, Putney, England (with thanks to its delightful vicar, the Rev. Giles Fraser). We were just south of the Thames River, in the Diocese of Southwark. What a glorious parish that is! All during the morning, I saw young families streaming in with children of all sizes and demeanors. The energy and enthusiasm of that place was truly inspiring.

St. Mary's Parish, Putney, is also known for its association with Oliver Cromwell. In 1647, Cromwell gathered his officers and leaders at St. Mary's Church to discuss the issues. The Levellers were in grand form. Colonel Thomas Rainborough finally declared that "the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he." The grammar might seem strange to us in our time, but the sentiment is sure. All are equal in the eyes of God. Those discussions are now known as "The Putney Debates," and many of their very phrases made it into our own United States Constitution discussions.

As I preached on Sunday, I stared directly into a plaque with those words of Rainborough: "The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he." My sermon was around the words of the resurrected Jesus, who showed up on the shore one morning when the disciples had been fishing. "Come and have breakfast," said Jesus.

That invitation of Jesus, "Come and have breakfast," was the final indication to the disciples that they no longer had to doubt his identity. They knew it was Jesus by his invitation to share food together. The grace and truth of Jesus is made known by his invitation, and his continuing invitation, to come to the table.

I love breakfast. It is the meal which opens the day, which turns darkness into light. It appears at the transition of time. It is a fine moment to accept the invitation of Jesus. But the greatest meals of my own life have been those where I have known that everyone was also invited to the table. The poorest he, the greatest he, the lowest she, and the highest she, have been invited. At its best, the Christian Church carries that invitation forward into history.

The Anglican tradition of Christianity is also represented, at our best, by this broad invitation. Our struggle to know Jesus Christ has been wrapped up in our struggle to recognize the common people, from the Magna Carta of 1215 ("the English Church shall be free"), to the Elizabethan Settlement of the 1500's (which recognized both Catholic and Protestant principles of Christianity), to the Putney Debates of 1647, to the church structure of the United States Episcopal Church in

1789 (which grants real authority to lay people), to our own day of trying to welcome all at the table of Jesus Christ. At our best, Anglican common prayer brings differences together at the table of God.

There is nothing so welcome after a dark night, perhaps after a night of fishing without result, perhaps after a night of dark dreams, perhaps after a night of division, to hear the words of Jesus, "Come and have breakfast." I accept the invitation. I want to join the poorest and the greatest at the table of grace and truth.

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