

Every year come early August, you can find me in the main drag of the Indiana State Fair, contemplating whatever new fried food they have come up with that year. This past August it was chocolate-dipped bacon, and the year before that, deep-fried cobbler.

Deep-fried fair food is just one part of the State Fair tradition for my family – for the last quarter century, we’ve visited the same exhibits and eaten more or less the same food, though the marquee performers have changed and the fairgrounds have grown slightly more worn.

Starting at the animal barns, we visit the cows, sheep, goats, horses, and llamas, always saving the World’s Biggest Pig for last. Then we head to the Pioneer Village, where we watch watch the making of sweet-smelling beeswax candles, listen to jug bands and church hymns, and run our fingers over the smooth, hand-made wooden bowls and clay pots.

My favorite part of the fair, though, is the Home and Family Arts Building. While my mom wanders around upstairs looking at the photography competition, I often sit in silence in the stained-glass cathedral made by the prize-winning quilts.

Hung from the second-story balcony, far away from grimy hands covered in cotton candy, these quilts are awe-inspiring to an amateur quilter like me. Covered in blue ribbons, the quilts depict intricate patterns of doves and rings, flowers and stars, which often take my

breath away. They are perfect and pristine in their beauty, and I am sure that I will never so much as attempt to make a quilt so beautiful as these.

I am similarly awed and paralyzed when faced by the masterpiece that is the life of Lancelot Andrewes, whose feast we celebrated yesterday in the Episcopal Church. In the great communion of Saints and Sinners from Anglican history, Lancelot Andrewes stands out as a particularly wholesome specimen. Born in 1555 in London, Andrewes was known early on to be a brilliant student, entering Cambridge at the age of 16. Following a spectacular university career in which he was ordained, made a Cambridge fellow, and then appointed a catechist, Andrewes began a period of his life which, in retrospect, makes him appear to be the Forrest Gump of the early Church of England.

Just as Gump managed to meet JFK, Nixon, Johnson and Abbie Hoffman, Andrewes' life was inextricably linked with the great luminaries and power players of the early Church of England. Andrewes served first as chaplain to the Earl of Huntingdon, then to the great Archbishop John Whitgift, next to Queen Elizabeth I, and finally served as court preacher to King James I. In the meantime, Andrewes made friends with such great scholars as Sir Walter Raleigh, was appointed dean of Westminster Cathedral, taught the poet George Herbert, and oversaw a complete translation of what would come to be known as the King James Version of the bible.

Despite his great stature as an Anglican hero, every image of Lancelot Andrewes portrays him as a stoop-shouldered, somewhat slight older man clutching a book and wearing a ruff, rochet and skull cap. He is never smiling – in fact, he often looks like he is scowling - and is known by all accounts to have been an extremely serious man. The Bishop of Litchfield via Lesser Feasts and Fasts describes Andrewes as “the most Devout that I ever saw ... of such a Growth in all kind of Learning that very able Clerks were of a low Stature to him.” With Andrewes, as with so many of the people that I meet through Lesser Feasts and Fasts, I am awed by his perfection and yet at the same time depressed by his extreme holiness, knowing that Andrewes has reached a height that I will never be able to touch. My hands are too grimy, and so I sit gazing in awe at perfection with which I cannot identify.

In his private prayers, however, Andrewes seems more human, warmer somehow than his public personality.

Look on me with those eyes, Andrewes prayed,  
Look on me with those eyes  
With which thou didst look upon  
Magdalene at the feast,  
Peter in the hall,  
The thief on the wood.

Again and again in his prayers, Andrewes begged for cleansing, healing, and forgiveness, the same forgiveness that Jesus offered to Mary

Magdalene, Peter and others who were loved by Christ. In his preaching, Andrewes continually extolled the value of prayer, and the necessity of obedience to God in our daily prayer life. Andrewes himself was said to have spent up to five hours a day in his private chapel, though he believed that corporate prayer was the most acceptable to God.

Like many of you, I'm guessing, I feel like I've succeeded in prayer when I'm able to give five uninterrupted minutes to God each day; and so Andrewes' dedication and piety are somewhat awe-inspiring. One must ask, however, what was happening outside the walls of the church while Bishop Andrewes worshipped in the beauty of holiness?

Outside the walls of the church, all hell was continually breaking loose. From the first moments of his adult reign, Andrewes' patron King James was distrusted by many. During his kingship, James' mother Mary was executed in order to make way for his undisputed monarchy in Scotland. James was known to have affairs with the powerful men whom he chose as advisors, and after his marriage to Anne of Denmark James is said to have continued affairs both with his advisors and with women of the court. James' oppression of Roman Catholics spurred the famous Gunpowder Plot, in which Guy Fawkes and others attempted to blow up Parliament. As a result, numerous Jesuits were captured, tortured and imprisoned. Due to his belief in the Divine Right of Kings, James had a tendency to dissolve parliament whenever he encountered disagreement, contributing to his reputation as an autocrat. Not least

on the list of James' criticisms, throughout his reign, most of his subjects continued to live in abject poverty and ignorance as feudal serfs.

What of Andrewes, then?

I want to be able to say that, as a powerful defender of the church and as a deeply grounded theologian, Andrewes was able to find a way to speak into the broken parts of King James' life. I want to be able to say that Andrewes took courageous stands on behalf of the poor and oppressed, using his voice and chosen position to speak truth to power. No hint of this can be found in his sermons, however. Andrewes buried himself in prayer and scholarship, becoming known for his erudite interpretation of scripture. And while we will never know what Andrewes and James talked about in pastoral moments, it is likely that Andrewes either failed to challenge the king or did not see a need to do so.

I am grateful for these imperfections in Andrewes' life.

Each year after I visit the prize-winning quilts which float high above the fairgoers, I walk into the side-alcoves of this particular Cathedral to look at the more humble entries – those quilts that have won third or fourth place, or that have won no prize at all. Every entry, no matter how poorly made, is displayed with dignity in beautiful glass cases. These quilts, close enough to touch, are so human – you can see where the stitches are uneven, where the pieces of fabric don't quite meet, or

where a pattern has gone slightly awry.

These quilts, though – they look like mine, like something I might make. I see my own amateur attempts reflected back at me through the glass, and I leave these quilts reminded that I, too, am capable of creating beauty with cloth.

This is why I am grateful for the flaws in Lancelot Andrewes, and in so many of our great Anglican heroes. When we look past the distant view so often presented by Lesser Feasts and Fasts or by our own teaching and legends, when we look beyond these to find the human beings behind the heroes, we are able to realize that we too are capable of joining the great communion of saints and sinners. Despite our uneven stitches and somewhat mismatched material, we too are capable of great works of art, of entering into the imperfect beauty of holiness that is the Anglican life.

Amen.