

Charlie Mutton, a young member of St Aldhelm's, Branksome in Poole, took part in the national finals of the Cranmer Awards competition at Hampton Court Palace on Saturday 24th February. The event helps to promote appreciation of the Book of Common Prayer as both a bedrock of the Church of England and a spiritual and liturgical resource for all ages. Here he recounts how it went....

Anxiety was a constant companion throughout the couple of weeks leading up to the Cranmer awards finals. Upon the revelation that we should have in fact been memorising the passage due for recitation in just a week's time, our focus pivoted quickly as in 3-4 practise sessions I had to master peeling my eyes off the pages and towards the face of uncertainty, stuttering and confusion. Admittedly, just two days before attending the awards I had intended to talk to Father Pip (my vicar at St Alhelm's) about dropping out entirely. But then something hit me, something that I hadn't experienced since childhood. Confidence. But not in myself, instead in God's promises.

When we turned up on the day after a rather cramped but spirited car journey we were immediately greeted by great enthusiasm from the event organisers and even had the fortune of meeting others we had met at regional heats previously! When entering the room we would be reading in, I felt that confidence begin to falter. Constantly rolling over verses and verses of this beautiful language, in that moment I felt sure that the words would scatter when I called on them during my reading. Luckily I was right in the middle of those called to speak and this meant I had time to pray, consult with my team (my partner Sophie, one of our church wardens Diane, our vicar Pip and curate Roybn) and as I stood after hearing my name and observing the others (who clearly themselves were simply here to share their passion for God's word) I realised I couldn't do anything myself, I had to trust God wholeheartedly.

So how did it go? It wasn't perfect, I stumbled over lines and needed a prompt to ensure I was going in the right direction. But it was honest, emotive and full of that very same anxiety and confusion I was sure would overcome my heart. Instead my lips gently threaded these feelings into each phrase and verse and unconsciously Psalm 139 became more personal than ever. The battle of Ego, the scorching fire of anxieties took their place in verses like 'Do not I hate them O LORD who hate thee?' And 'Try me O God, and seek the ground of my heart'. This whole experience has been one that has developed my experience with these feelings and given me a deeper understanding of myself, but foremost it has been a unique opportunity to develop my trust in God. To fully submit to his call. My flesh might resent talking in public but my spirit yearns for the opportunity to share the truth that is Christ.

After stuffing my face with the wealth of food provided we walked down to the heart of the palace and into The Chapel Royal, greeted by a beautiful choir performing above us, a group of men who inherited the profession. Truly it felt like a 'thin place', a place where the golden stars painted over the deep blue ocean on the ceiling might give way to a great light from the movies. In the moment I sat down I fell instantly into deep prayer, overcome with great gratitude that I could see and hear such beauty. This was a far cry from the life I had been living just a year ago.

The announcements felt rightfully long, competition had been fierce. But even after hearing my name called as the recipient of 1st place my focus was elsewhere. On the true glory of the day.

The true glory of the day at Hampton Court was in the pauses, the glances at teachers and parents. The glory was in the mercy shown to those struggling and the encouragement to the meek speaker full of fleshly fear. In these reproofs of tender moments of compassion do we see our God, present in all things. Working to protect us from our ego, from our anxiety. In Thomas Cranmer's beautiful compilation we have an indispensable weapon in this field. The very beautiful, very Anglican yet completely universal, Book of Common Prayer.