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### Session 2: Anglican Belief & Practice

- **Anglican Belief: How do the Creeds and *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* help us?**

- ✓ As early as the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century baptismal participants affirmed the Apostles' Creed, which came to be viewed as a kind of syllabus for the faith. The Anglican Church recognizes the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as concise yet comprehensive summaries of the Christian faith essentials. They are true because they encapsulate what Scripture teaches regarding Christianity's core beliefs.
- ✓ Apostles' and Nicene Creeds: Some highlights
  - Apostles' Creed — trinitarian, focus/weight is on the center that speaks to Christ's person and work. Author(s) is unknown.
  - Nicene Creed — the focus is on the full deity of Christ. The Creed was a result of 318 bishops called together by Constantine in 325CE to settle dispute with Arius who maintained Jesus was of *similar* essence with the Father but not the *same* essence. The council sided with Athanasius who argued Jesus is of the *same* essence with the Father ("God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being [consubstantial] with the Father,").
- ✓ Distinctives of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*
  - Two-pronged approach: 1) intended to lay out essential Christian doctrine and 2) draw lines in the sand between Reformation Anglicanism and Catholic doctrine.
  - In the same way that confirmation gives everyone the same starting point, the *Thirty-nine Articles* give every adherent the same doctrinal framework from which to embark on the journey of the Christian faith. They promote unity by clarifying the doctrinal distinctives of Anglicanism vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism.

- **Anglican Practice**

- ✓ **The Sacraments of Baptism & Eucharist: Meaning & Significance**

It's helpful if we begin by avoiding two extremes:

1. making too little of a connection between the sign and the thing signified.
2. making too much of a connection between the sign and the thing signified.

Principally speaking, the efficacy of the sacraments is dependent on the Spirit of God to inspire faith in the participants. Sacraments not only demonstrate faith, but in some mysterious way impart faith (contra an ordinance/credobaptism).

**Sacraments are means of grace:**

J. I. Packer, writes in his *Concise Theology* "The sacraments are rightly viewed as means of grace, for God makes them means to faith, using them to strengthen faith's confidence in his promises and to call forth acts of faith for receiving the good gifts signified. The efficacy of the sacraments to this end resides not in the faith or virtue of the minister but in the faithfulness of God, who, having given the signs, is now pleased to use them ... As the preaching of the Word makes the gospel audible, so the sacraments make it visible, and God stirs up faith by both means."

Put differently, when someone believes the gospel, it is not the words that are believed but the truths that the words convey. Likewise, when someone is baptized or partakes of holy communion, it is not the water or the elements of bread and wine that are trusted, but what is

signified by them. The sacraments are tools in the hand of God to instill faith and to strengthen us in it.

This is not to say, however, that the words spoken during these sacramental events do nothing. As Ben Myers writes: “They are words that perform: like naming a yacht, or making a bet, or speaking a marriage vow. In baptism [and communion], something is brought into being as the words are spoken.” **The words of our baptismal service, taken from the BCP, are a declaration of the realities that the sacraments bear.** The priest (Celebrant) addresses the parents of the child being baptized with these powerful words:

***Feel the weight of that!***

Today, on behalf of *this child*, you shall make vows to renounce the devil and all his works, to trust God wholeheartedly, and to serve him faithfully. It is your task to see that *this child is* taught, as soon as *he is* able to learn, the meaning of all these vows, and of the Faith that you will profess as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. *He* must come to put *his* faith in Jesus Christ, and learn the Creeds, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and all other things that a Christian ought to know, believe, and do for the welfare of *his soul*. When *he has* embraced all these, *he is* to come to the Bishop to be confirmed, that *he* may publicly claim the Faith for *his* own and be further strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve Christ and his kingdom.

Are you willing and ready to undertake this?

*Godparents and Sponsoring Parents*

**I am, the Lord being my helper.**

✓ **Baptism: First, some general remarks about baptism**

- Baptism was the precept of Christ (Matt 28:19) and the practice of the Apostles (Acts 2:38, 41).
- Baptism is Trinitarian (Matt 3:16; 28:19) and, therefore, marks the participant as distinctly Christian. The practice of baptism was not new in Jesus's day and was appropriated or co-opted by Christians to signify a change in allegiance.
- Baptism signifies at least three things:
  1. Our union with Christ (Rom 6:3-5)
  2. God's forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 6:1 1; Tit 3:5; Heb 10:22)
  3. The gift of the Spirit (Matt 3:11; Acts 2:38-39)

**What about Paedobaptism (infant baptism)?**

"The New Testament neither illustrates nor prescribes nor forbids" it (J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*).

- The link between baptism and circumcision: Under the old covenant, parents presented their male child to the community for circumcision signifying a commitment to rear the child in the faith of that community (Incidentally, females were represented by proxy in the male, who represented the entire family; see Gen 17:10-22). But note, physical circumcision meant little if a “circumcision of the heart” was not also evident (see Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer



4:4). **Whereas physical circumcision *initiates*, it was spiritual circumcision of the heart that consummates the participant into full covenant status.** These ideas were carried through into the new covenant in the practice of baptism. In Col 2:11-12 Paul links together circumcision and baptism as visible signs of that invisible reality called spiritual circumcision of the heart (also, Rom 2:28-29). Note also, that ...

- just as children benefit from the faith of one believing parent in a mixed marriage (1 Cor. 7:14), so too baptized children benefit from the faith of believing parents, as well as the faith of the believing community into which they are baptized.
- A baptized child, therefore, shares covenant membership by proxy of their parents, who give to them the sign of their membership within the covenant community. Baptism is a visible pledge by the parents to God and to the covenant community that their child will be reared in the Christian faith.
- What is **not conveyed** by God to a child in baptism is a saving faith that regenerates at the time of baptism.
- What **is conveyed** by God to a child in baptism is a disposition/inclination **to** saving faith such that, at some point in the future, the child is capable of responding in faith to the gospel message because they have been immersed in a culture of faith in the gospel message, which baptism portrays. "Baptism is the pledge of God's new life. But it is like a seed: it only germinates when it encounters the water of repentance and the sunshine of faith" (Rev Canon Dr. Michael Green, d. 2019).
- Paedobaptism, therefore, is promissory in nature; it is forward-focused. Once again, baptism initiates, but faith consummates the participant into life with Christ. Article 25 of the *Articles of Religion* states that the sacraments are to be received "worthily" for them to be operative in us. Article 26 defines what this means, "as by faith, and rightly, do receive the Sacraments." So, faith is necessary for the baptismal promises to be realized. This is the Anglican way.
- A word about sequence: In NT times, it was primarily adults who were hearing the gospel message and coming to faith, so it made sense that faith precede baptism. However, we would do well to remember that the order in which events occur in Scripture varies. Consider: The first Holy Communion instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper was *before* his resurrection and ascension and certainly prior to the disciples' faith being fully formed. Yet Christ invited his followers to participate in the Supper! Also from Acts 8, 10, 19 we read the Spirit coming on some who were already baptized and had believed, while others were moved by the Spirit prior to belief and/or baptism.

We should not presume that a pattern or order of events from the NT is *necessarily* a prescription to follow. This is not to say the Church is free to roll out the sacraments in any order whatsoever. It is to say that the Church recognizes the priority of faith behind, before, and in all that the sacraments entail.

To that end, and going back to the linkage between baptism and circumcision, it's significant that Abraham was declared righteous by his faith and prior to his circumcision (Gen 15:6;



17:11). Paul even highlights this sequence in Rom 4:9-12 to insist that Gentiles are included in the promise by faith and that circumcision is explicitly not an instrument of salvation.

**Circumcision was a sign or a seal of the promise, not the means for attaining it. So too, with baptism.**

Most importantly, if the old covenant had a place for incorporating children into the household of faith by circumcision, how much more shall the new covenant do so by baptism (Col 2:11-12)? We cannot ignore that entire households were baptized (Cornelius, Acts 10; Lydia and Philippian jailer, Acts 16; Crispus, Acts 18; Stephanus, 1 Cor 1) and there is no reason *not* to think that children were present and included.

This is how John Stott puts it:

“What circumcision was to Abraham, Isaac and his descendants, baptism is to us. It is not only the sign of covenant membership, but a seal or pledge of covenant blessings. Baptism does not convey these blessings to us, but conveys to us a right or title to them, so that if and when we truly believe, we inherit the blessings to which baptism has entitled us .... But the receiving of the sign and seal, and the receiving of the blessings signified, are not necessarily (or even normally) simultaneous...***The reception of the sign, although it entitles [participants] to the gift, does not confer the gift on them. They need to be taught the indispensable necessity of personal repentance and faith if they are to receive the thing signified.***” — John Stott, "The Evangelical Doctrine of Baptism", *Churchman* 112/1 (1998)

- Finally, it's helpful to note how terms were used in the NT period. Whereas conversion to Christ involves many aspects of faith e.g., Christ crucified, forgiveness, resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, atonement, repentance, et al., the term "baptism" in the NT can be understood as shorthand for all of these ideas (used as figure of speech, metonymy; see Acts 2:38; Gal 3:27; 1 Pt 3:21). So, when Anglicans use the term "baptize," it has a meaning that is pregnant with implications and ideas pertaining to the salvation event!

#### **What about Adult Baptism?**

- First, adult baptisms are a wonderful indication that the Church is being faithful to her great commission given by Jesus, which is sharing the gospel and leading people to Christ.
- Typically, Anglican tradition assumes a repeat baptismal experience is unnecessary.
- Still, believers who have come to embrace Christ by faith would likely not think themselves exempt from any of the commands of Christ, esp. to be baptized (Matt 28:19). So, for those who have become believers as adults, Christ Our Life urges baptism for all who have not already been baptized.

#### ✓ **Eucharist**

Four biblical texts establish the institution of the Holy Eucharist (Communion, Lord's Supper): Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. [Note: The Bread of Life Sermon (John 6:35-58), where Jesus speaks of the need to feed on him by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, was preached before the Last Supper. It is, therefore, **better understood as being about what the Supper signifies** (i.e., communion with Christ by faith) **than about what the Supper means** (a change in the elements per Roman Catholic teaching).]



**Historically, there are four views regarding the efficacy of the elements:**

1. *Roman Catholic view: transubstantiation* - The substance of the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the substance of Christ's body and blood so that they are no longer bread and wine (Article 28 explicitly denies).
2. *Lutheran view: consubstantiation* - Christ's body and blood come to be present in, with, and under the form of the bread and wine, such that the elements become more than bread and wine though not less (Article 28 implicitly denies).
3. *Baptist/memorial view*: Following Ulrich Zwingli (1481-1534), this view holds to a symbolic meaning - it denies that the glorified Christ, who is now in heaven, is present in any way bodily, physically, or materially.
4. *Reformed view*: After John Calvin (1509-1564), this view appeals to mystery and holds that, though the bread and wine remain unchanged, **Christ through the Spirit grants true and very real enjoyment of his personal presence**, drawing worshipers into fellowship with himself in heaven (Heb 12:22-24) in a way that is glorious and very real, even if ineffable or indescribable (mysterious).

**Anglican Practice of the Holy Eucharist**

- Anglicans give thanks to Christ for his finished work of atonement rather than re-offer or re-activate the work of Christ as in the Catholic Mass portrayal of offering the elements (see Article 28).
- Anglicans affirm three layers of meaning for participants: It has ...
  1. a past reference to Christ's death as we remember the cost of our redemption.
  2. a present reference to our corporate feeding on him by faith, with implications for how we treat fellow believers (1 Cor 11:20-22).
  3. a future reference as we look ahead to Christ's return and are encouraged by the thought of it. Here, self-examination is imperative in light of our future judgment (1 Cor 11:28).

**Holy Eucharist at Christ Our Life**

The Eucharist table at Christ Our Life is open to anyone who has been baptized and expresses faith in Christ crucified and risen. We respectfully recognize there may be some exceptions to our Anglican heritage, and leadership will address those, along with other reservations or hesitations, as needed. Still, at the table we unite with everyone in the Body of Christ as we proclaim his death and resurrection until he appears again at the end of the age (Lk 22:16; Rev 19:9).

- ✓ **Communal and Sacramental Aspects: "Life Together"**  
See essay, ["A Meditation on the Holy Eucharist"](#).

- Next Up?
  - ✓ The Value of Liturgy
  - ✓ The Importance of a Sacramental Life