

Top Ten Reasons for being Anglican 2: THINK!

Psalm 108:8-13, John 3:14-21 [MW20-35]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 20 September 2020

I think this list [hold up 'Top Ten Reasons for Being Anglican']

- highlights some of the good things about being an Anglican
this list is not intended as a criticism of other churches or traditions
rather it is to show why Anglicans are best – oops, sorry, that's not it either
- actually, really, it is to say what have we got as Anglicans
that is likely to help people in their life and faith and relationship to God
- other traditions, other churches may have them too
however we definitely have them
- and we see these as particular advantages of being Anglican

Yes indeed, there are definite advantages in being an Anglican

- Robin Williams has as number seven on his list:
"you don't have to leave your brains at the door"
- why does he say that?
maybe he had had a bad experience somewhere ...
- but as Anglicans we think it's okay to ask questions
even though it might lead to some tricky situations

The young curate was giving his first "children's talk" in church. He had kept it fairly simple about following Jesus' example and helping your neighbour. As he was drawing to a close he asked, "Are there any questions?" His training had not quite prepared him for one girl's innocent query: "Why do cats and dogs fight?"

My understanding of all this is that we are not only allowed

- but encouraged to think for ourselves
as Anglicans, and indeed as Christians, we are encouraged to follow the example
of the people of Berea which we are told about in Acts 17:10-12

That same night the Lord's followers sent Paul and Silas on to Berea, and after they arrived, they went to the Jewish meeting place. The people in Berea were much nicer than those in Thessalonica, and they gladly accepted the message. Day after day they studied the Scriptures to see if these things were true. Many of them put their faith in the Lord, including some important Greek women and several men.

Day after day they studied, questioned, discussed ... to see if these things were true

- we are allowed and encouraged to accept the messages we hear
and also to test them, check them out for ourselves, ask questions and seek answers

You see in the Anglican church we have no doctrine of infallibility

- of Popes or of preachers!
we expect people to think about what is done and said
and to form their own opinions
- as Anglicans we accept we don't have all the answers
and encourage the questions
- if after discussion, input, reflection
we end up disagreeing or reach different conclusions
we are supposed to hang in there and work through it together
- remaining in fellowship while praying and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit

This number seven – thinking, reasoning, using our brains

- is actually fundamental to Anglicanism

has anyone come across this: ANGLI+CAN [hold up folder]?

a series of leaflets introducing the faith, history and practice of the Anglican church

- it was put together by Graeme Brady and in line with our theme this morning

this is what he wrote in the introduction:

The Anglican Church has been sufficient for all my needs. She has taught me faith. She has nurtured me with her sacraments. She has tolerated my rebellions and allowed me to think for myself.

This [hold up folder] was originally designed to help people prepare for confirmation

- and this revised version is great for Anglicans who wish to understand more about the teaching and history of their church

- so allow me to summarise some of what it says in relation to “Think!”

Anglicans claim that the foundations and authority of our belief are three-fold

- founded on Scripture, Tradition and Reason

and that this is like a three-legged stool:

take any one leg away and the stool will topple

- Scripture is the books of the Bible

the record of God’s revelation to men and women

- Scripture is our primary source of knowledge about God

and the Anglican church does not hold to any truth or doctrine

that is not contained in, or cannot be proved from, the Scriptures

- people continued to think about their faith after the Bible was written

since the earliest times the great minds of the church

have studied the revelation of Scripture in the light of their own experience

- so we in the Anglican Church are heirs of a unique tradition

a tradition of wisdom, prayer and experience which we rightly value

Albert Einstein said this:

The important thing is never to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structures of reality ... Never lose a holy curiosity.

Never lose a ‘holy curiosity’

- the third leg of the stool is just that - Reason: human wisdom and enquiry thinking, using our brains

our continuing attempt to define, interpret and formulate our belief

- I came across this on a church noticeboard:

There’s only one problem with religions that have all the answers - they don’t allow questions.

- in the Anglican church questions are not only allowed questions are encouraged

Humans are called ‘Homo Sapiens’ – the thinking animal

- God has given us the freedom and the ability to think for ourselves when we neglect to use that gift, we are less than human

One modern theologian has claimed that such neglect was in fact humans' original sin

- pointing out that long before Adam or Eve committed the sin of disobedience they had already committed the sin of sloth
- because they refused to think for themselves
- by letting the serpent do their thinking for them

It was this precise sin which caused the tragedies at Jonestown and Waco

- people were prepared to follow, without question the teachings of a deluded leader
- the same sin lay behind the gas chambers of Nazi Germany and the massacre at MyLai
- people followed the leader without question and refused to think for themselves

Which is why the Anglican Church positively encourages questions

- we believe the Gospel can stand up to all the testing we might choose to give it and, if it can't stand the test
- it is not worthy of our allegiance

We have little to fear in this regard

- as the great philosopher John Stuart Mill pointed out: "truth always benefits from collisions with error"

Jesus followed the tradition of asking and encouraging questions

- in our gospel reading this morning he positively invites speculation
who do the crowds say I am?
but you, you my closest friends, who do you say I am???
- those who think that a person is losing their faith, merely because they question it are missing the point: to question is to care

I said earlier that the Anglican Church has no corner on the market

- the three 'legs' of belief: Scripture, Tradition, Reason are not the exclusive property of the Anglican Church
- the Protestant Churches have long laid claim to the Scriptures as the foundation, the basis for following Jesus and living in the world
- the Roman Catholic Church, at least up until the time of the Second Vatican Council leaned, perhaps too heavily, on Tradition
- giving an almost overbearing authority to the Church which it just cannot possess

Other Christian movements have given an over the top emphasis to human reason

- or experience
- the 'liberal' movements of the twentieth century often made too much of our intellectual achievements
- sometimes modern church groups with their emphasis on personal experience have been guilty of making following Jesus narrow and restricted

The fact is that an exclusive dependence on any one leg of the stool

- will nearly always degenerate into rigidity and legalism
- the three legs must go together
if the stool is to stay upright

Graeme Brady concludes:

... if Anglicanism has a particular genius it is our ability to hold all three legs together,
if not always in balance.

Scripture, Tradition, Reason

- all good gifts
- all for us to use

Here's what the Pastor of a small-town United States Quaker congregation says in his book
Front Porch Tales

I was singing in the Easter choir once, and a man asked me why the song said Jesus died on a tree. I was so eager to impress, I gave him a long, seminary-type answer about crucifixion methods in first century Palestine. He just listened to me go on, then said, "Oh, I just thought maybe they used the word 'tree' because it rhymed."

A lot of folks think closeness to God means knowing all the right answers. But I don't agree. I think closeness to God begins the night we toss and turn in bed, realising we don't know it all. Look at the Bible. Some of its finest saints were long on questions: Job on his ash heap, the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray. Nicodemus grilling Jesus late into the night. Even Jesus on the cross.

Having spent much of my life showing off my smarts, I nearly choke on the words, "I don't know." Still, I suspect those words might be the kingdom keys. What it boils down to is that God doesn't care whether or not we have right answers. Just right hearts.

Philip Gulley

Never lose a 'holy curiosity'

- never be afraid to "not know"
- rather try to find out

Thank goodness we don't have to leave our brains at the door when we come to church

- or when we leave!

we are to use our brains, our Reason, in the service of God

to help the Good News take root and grow in people's hearts *and* minds