

Top Ten Reasons for being Anglican 3: WAYS WITH WATER

Ephesians 4:1-10, Matthew 3:13-17 [MW20-38]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 18 October 2020

A woman called the church office because she wanted her cat, Homer, baptised! The Vicar explained that this was a little out of his line and referred her to a friend, a Presbyterian pastor at a church down the street. Later, the Vicar learned that the Presbyterian pastor had referred her to a Methodist minister, who had referred her to someone else. About an hour later, she called the Vicar back, very frustrated. The woman said she was at her wit's end, couldn't find anyone to baptise Homer, and didn't know what to do. She said she planned to give one thousand dollars to the church of the minister who performed this service for Homer. The Vicar took only a moment to mull this over, and then he said to her, "Well, why didn't you tell me Homer was an Anglican cat in the first place?!"

Number two on Robin Williams' list is

- "you don't have to know how to swim to be baptised"
remember there is no criticism or making fun of any other church or tradition
the important point is you don't *have* to know how to swim
- you may indeed know how to swim, but it is not required

Some churches, some traditions, some denominations

- would like to say there is only one way to be baptised: their way
or if other ways are admitted, their way is the best
- some of these churches or denominations hold a very strong position though
and would argue that other ways of baptising are not valid
are not real or true baptism
- usually these churches hold very strongly the view that the only valid baptism is
"full immersion"
- do you know what that is ... just like with John the Baptist in the Jordan river:
being put right under the water
fully clothed, fully covered, coming up coughing and spluttering, totally drenched
- the matter of baptism is so important for some churches
that they have a "baptistery" right up the front in their building
or a huge tank or pool that they use

Baptism is so important for Anglicans too

- baptism is one of the two 'biggies'
right up there with communion

Here's a 'crash course' in "sacraments" from the Anglican perspective

- and again I'm relying on a leaflet from ANGLI+CAN

'A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace' ... A sacrament is a sign that points to something other than itself. But a sacrament is more than a sign. It gives something – an inward and spiritual grace – to the person that receives it. The Anglican Church has always distinguished between two 'Gospel Sacraments' which are necessary to salvation and five others that are 'commonly called sacraments'. The Gospel Sacraments are those directly commanded by Jesus: the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Of course all human beings are created in God's image and loved by God

- the way we acknowledge this and become part of the family of God is through baptism
- there is no other way except baptism
- Anglicans hold this just as strongly as any church or denomination
- only, as Anglicans, we have a "wide" view of baptism
- I know of Anglican churches where people have been baptised in the sea, in a river, in a swimming pool, in a tank borrowed from the AOG
- I have a colleague in the Roman Catholic Church who baptises babies by full immersion in a font
- I don't know what the parents/families think
- I'm not sure if he removes the heirloom gown before he does it
- the Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne includes a magnificent marble baptistery like a pool that you climb up and then go down into
- the Anglican Church says these are all equally valid baptisms and you don't have to know how to swim because full immersion is not the only way

Anglicans say that *what* is happening is much more important than *how* it happens

- we are concerned with the substance, not the form the reality rather than the ritual
- throughout church history people have argued about "baptism" new churches, whole denominations, have been started because of issues to do with baptism
- the Anglican Church embraces it all: that's Robin Williams' point it's not *how* you get baptised that's important it is *that* you get baptised!
- as long as it involves water applied in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the presence of the people of God, then it's just fine!

Baptism is for Anglicans full entry into God's kingdom

- once you are baptised you're a fully paid up life member you receive all the benefits and alongside that you undertake certain responsibilities
- for all who are baptised have a particular ministry they are called to exercise and this remains true no matter how wet you get at baptism!
- Robin Williams is so right when he says you don't have to know how to swim but you do have to know how to *serve*

If we can get past the form

- and whether we have a font or a fountain
- Anglicans and most other denominations and traditions line up pretty well along these lines
- this is from Leaflet 18 in ANGLI+CAN

We baptise because Jesus commanded us to baptise. He said, "...unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God." (*John 3:5*) And he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". (*Matthew 28:19*)

Two things happen in baptism. First, the candidate for baptism reaches out in faith and says 'Credo. I give you my life and my heart.' Then the baptising minister either plunges the candidate under water, or pours water over the candidate's head, while announcing that this person has entered into a new state of life; a state in which he or she belongs to God, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The outward and visible sign of the sacrament is the water in which the person is baptised and the precise form of words, "I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". The inward and spiritual grace towards which the sign points, is death to sin and a new birth into a new way of life.

Jesus' teaching about baptism is clearly stated in his discussion with Nicodemus. (*John 3:1-8*) Jesus says that at our natural birth we are born into the present world. But if we would be citizens of God's kingdom, the new age of God's rule, we must be born again and receive a new life. Saint Paul expresses the same idea when he talks of dying to the old way and rising to the new way and being made part of Christ's body.

In fact Paul's experience as Saul on the Damascus road convinced him that the relationship between Jesus and his disciples was so close that when Saul persecuted the church he was persecuting Jesus himself. Consequently St Paul taught that in baptism we not only join the church, we become part of Christ himself.

As part of Christ we share the benefits of Christ's Life, Death and Resurrection. Our old life of sin and separation is washed away, and in Christ we are adopted as sons and daughters of God (*Galatians 4:4-5, Romans 8:15-17*). We must live and do all things "in Christ" (*Ephesians 1:3*) and allow his life to live through our lives.

So far, so good

- but where Anglicans and some others begin to get wary
and where things begin to come unstuck
is the matter of baptising children
- in one sense it is no issue at all
it is part of the tradition of the church right from the very beginning
- on the other hand there are those who point out
that as there is no direct reference to the baptism of children in the New Testament
we should not do it

Anglicans however see it like this – again from ANGLI+CAN Leaflet 18

While the New Testament contains no direct reference to the baptism of children, it is there by inference. Jesus says "...unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. (*John 3:5*) He also says "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (*Mark 10:14*) So if children are to belong to the Kingdom of God, and if admission to the Kingdom of God is only by baptism, then surely Jesus intended that children should be baptised.

We also note that the baptism of children is a custom dating from the very earliest days of the church. In Acts 16:15 Lydia was baptised "... with her household ..." and in 1 Corinthians 1:16 Paul says, "I did baptise also the household of Stephanus". These two references refer to a prevailing custom in those times. If the head of the household believed, he would be baptised along with his household – his wife, his children, his servants and his slaves. That's not so strange. Most parents make most decisions on behalf of their children. They decide where their children will live, what they will wear and eat, how they should behave and where they will go to school. It's common sense that they should also make decisions about their child's faith.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly of all – we believe that the baptism of children witnesses to an important spiritual truth: our faith begins not with what we do for God, but with what God does for us. In baptising children we remind ourselves of that important fact over and over again.

The heart of the matter for me is the question:

- is baptism something we do or something God does?
if it's something we do, then it's important to get it right
- it's important to use the right amount of water
the age of the person being baptised is important
they must be able understand and explain what is happening
to respond, make an informed choice

For me though, baptism is our response to God's invitation

- being put in a situation where the Holy Spirit is able to work
and in that sense seems more about what God does
than what we do

In baptism there is a sense of 'mystery', of grace, of possibility

- it seems to me about water and the Spirit
and not dependent on how much or how old
- water is the source of life
without it no seed can grow or sprout
- water is the source of life
without it no child of God can grow or develop
- it's all about a celebration of life
and not much about swimming!

Remember, as it says in the Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4 verse 5:
There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism