

Top Ten Reasons for being Anglican 4: BELIEVE IT OR NOT!

John 16:27-33 [MW20-38]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 25 October 2020

A couple of stories on the theme “believe it or not” ...

The drought of the past winter threatened the crop in a village of Crete. The priest told his flock: "There isn't anything that will save us, except a special litany for rain. Go to your homes, fast during the week, believe and come on Sunday for the litany of rain." The villagers heard him, fasted during the week and went to the church on Sunday morning, but as soon as the priest saw them, he was furious. He said, "Go away, I will not do the litany. You do not believe." "But Father," they protested, "we fasted and we believe." "Believe? And where are your umbrellas?"

A group of four-year-olds were gathered in a Sunday school class. Their enthusiastic teacher looked at the class and asked this question: "Does anyone know what today is?" A little four-year-old girl held up her finger and said, "Yes, today is Palm Sunday." The teacher exclaimed, "That's fantastic! That's wonderful! Now does anyone know what next Sunday is?" The same little girl held up her finger and said, "Yes, next Sunday is Easter Sunday." Once again the teacher said, "That's fantastic! Now, does anyone know what makes next Sunday Easter?" The same little girl responded and said, "Yes, next Sunday is Easter because Jesus rose from the grave." But before the teacher could congratulate her, she continued, "But if he sees his shadow, he has to go back in for seven weeks."

The number one reason for being an Anglican according to Robin Williams is

- no matter what you believe
there's bound to be at least one other Anglican who agrees with you!
- someone, somewhere in the world agrees with you
no matter how weird, how whacky, how off the wall, beyond the boundaries
at least one person agrees with you
- you are not alone

That's the number one reason for being Anglican

- not, please note, “believe whatever you wish”
rather, “whatever you believe, you are not alone”

This is the essence of Anglicanism

- this is what differentiates us from other traditions
denominations, ways of being church
- and perhaps it is most succinctly encapsulated like this:
“we belong before we believe” [Joanna Wragg] **[Slide 1]**

At its heart perhaps being Anglican is more about belonging than believing

- that's not to say believing is not important, because it is
however Anglican understanding says your belonging will inform your believing
- or to put it another way:
you don't have to agree to a certain set of statements
you don't have to understand things in a particular way
in order to belong
- if you would like to belong, you belong

Peppered through my sermon this morning are some thoughtful/humorous one-liners

- which come from a wonderful website I discovered
"365+ Reasons for being Anglican" - it's already up to 519!
- so, if you would like to belong, you belong ... or to put it another way:
"We've set a place for you" [Carol Marsh] **[Slide 2]**

Yes, what you believe is important

- it's just that, as Anglicans, on the whole we are more interested in you as a person than checking that what you believe and that the way you follow Jesus lines up exactly with any particular outline or creed
- "Try us. You'll like us. And we'll love you." [Matthew G. Livingwood] **[Slide 3]**
yes, we are very interested in what you believe
not to check it, not to change it, not to make sure it lines up
- we are just genuinely interested in what you believe
we'd like to know, to have a real discussion, to engage with you

But if you would rather not say

- if that's all a bit much or a bit scary
that's okay too!

Robin Williams' number one point I think also says something about God

- God is revealed in the world God created
God is revealed in word and action
and so God can be known and recognised
- because of that, no matter how unusual or unconventional
every belief has its basis in some revelation of God
and so can be shared by at least one other human being

There are wonderful opportunities for learning and sharing and discovering

- it is comforting to realise that we are not alone
that no matter how bizarre a person's beliefs there is a point of connection
there is a place to belong
- for at its best the Anglican church is a safe place
a safe haven in which to explore and grow

"We'll never tell you you have to believe in God the way we do to be a good person, but we can tell you how our belief in God makes the goodness in us." [P. J. Howe] **[Slide 4]**

So does all this mean there is nothing that can be said about what Anglicans believe???

- Graeme Brady, the author of this very readable
and extremely enlightening publication ANGLI+CAN says this:

The difficulty in describing what Anglicans believe

lies in the fact that the Anglican Church has no faith of its own **[Slide 5]**

Wow! The Anglican Church has no faith of its own! Indeed no!

- because the Anglican Church stands on the Bible, the Creeds
and the shared tradition of the people of God
- and in fact in highlighting "Anglican Belief" Graeme Brady goes on to quote
Bishop Jeremy Taylor of Down, defending his position in 1661
- and it is still pretty helpful in 2020

What can be wanting in the Church of England? We have the Word of God, the Faith of the Apostles, the Creeds of the Primitive Church, the Articles of the first four General Councils, a holy liturgy, excellent prayers, perfect Sacraments, faith and repentance, the Ten Commandments, the sermons of Christ and all the precepts and counsels of the gospels.

We teach the necessity of good works. We live in obedience to God, and are willing to die for Him, and do so when He requires us to do so. We speak honourably of His Holy Name. We worship Him. We love His servants. We pray for all men. We love all Christians, even our most erring brethren. We confess our sins to God and to our brethren who we have offended, and to God's ministers in cases of trouble or of a troubled conscience.

We communicate often. Our priests absolve the penitent. Our Bishops ordain priests and confirm baptised persons, and bless their people and intercede for them. And what could there be wanting?

Nearly three centuries later the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher stated:
(Note: the term "Catholic" with a capital "C" means "universal")

We have no doctrine of our own – we only possess the Catholic Doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic Creeds and these Creeds we hold without addition or diminution. We stand on that rock. **[Slide 6]**

Think of the Anglican Church as a huge multi-coloured umbrella in the middle of that rock
- or maybe a giant many-sided roof which has that rock as its foundation
underneath this roof are lots of different rooms or spaces
for people to gather and congregate
- but there are no outside walls or doors
people come and go freely

It seems to me that the greatest gift the Anglican Church has to offer
- is the ability to gather under this one roof or umbrella
people of diverse, and sometimes opposing
theological, academic, musical, worship, social positions
- yet, different as they are, all are one because all are Anglican

"We don't say we're right and others are wrong. We say 'Peace be with you'."
[Don Catchpole] **[Slide 7]**

As Anglicans we say believing is important
- so important you'll never believe on your own!
we also say that no matter what you believe
you can still be with us
- and yes, this way of being is open to all sorts of abuse
yet we choose to see things like a family
where no matter what ... you are always part of the family

"We are a haven for the spiritually wondering." [Mary Jane Herron] **[Slide 8]**

We say that belonging comes first
- and that the quality of our belonging
will inform our believing

“The calling of an Anglican is not to fill the church, but to fill heaven.” [Rev. Selwyn Swift]
[Slide 9]

I'm going to conclude this sermon and this series
- with this quote about what makes the church
again it comes from ANGLI+CAN

The Church is One because Christ is one and the Church shares his one life. This does not ignore the fact that the Church is divided among many different denominations. Rather, it affirms the truth that the Church's essential unity is Christ himself.

The Church is Holy not because the people of the Church live lives of outstanding moral excellence, but because Christ is Holy and his Holy Spirit possesses the Church.

The Church is Catholic – or universal – because Christ is the truth for all times, in all places and for all people.

The Church is Apostolic because it proclaims the Apostolic Gospel, holds the Apostolic Creeds and Scriptures, is governed by Apostolic authority and is renewed and fed by Apostolic Sacraments. It is the same Church which was called forth by God, restored by Christ and handed on by the Apostles.

[Slide 10]

... we remember that the Church owes its identity not to the men and women who make up its outward sign, but to Jesus its head and its heart.

We have no doctrine of our own. We have only the doctrine of the Universal Christian Church as it is enshrined in the Scriptures and the Creeds. Consequently there are those who say we are wishy-washy, neither one thing nor the other. But if the practice of tolerance and a willingness to allow people to be unique and different is to be wishy-washy, then I'm all for it. For we manage to hold together in one Church two seemingly opposed styles of faith and worship, one Catholic and the other Protestant. These two styles exist together as part of an on-going debate and each represents an important part of our common faith. The Protestant element provides an emphasis on faith, conversion and atonement. The Catholic element provides its emphasis on grace, sacrament and incarnation. By living together in tension they point up the wide differences of opinion which exist within the Christian Church. At the same time they prove that the highest unity is never a bare numerical unity but one which embraces a wealth of diversity. It's untidy. But the Anglican Church is not for those who like their truth tied up in neat packages.

Time for reflection

Prayer

(this prayer is from our New Zealand Prayer Book, Daily Devotions, page 125)

*Look kindly on our world, our God,
as we suffer and struggle with one another.
Look kindly on your church,
driven by the same necessity;
and may the light we have seen in Jesus
illuminate and brighten all the world.
Amen.*