Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Understanding ourselves – Week 40

The 39 Articles

Day 274. What do Anglicans understand to be true?

Every time that humans have lived has been turbulent, and the 1500's were no different. Many people were questioning the practices and beliefs of the church. In England, King Henry the 8th wrote a book defending the catholic ("universal") faith and was given the title "Fidei Defensor" [Defender of the Faith] which is still used by the English monarchy today. In 1531, just ten years later, he had himself declared the supreme head of the Church of England (a good encapsulation of this is found at https://www.historyonthenet.com/henry-viii-and-the-break-with-rome-timeline) (as a side note, Henry was not what you would call a "nice" man. He was a tyrant, in every sense of the word). During all this turmoil, it was tasked to a man named Thomas Cranmer to define what the English church believed. He wrote the original Book of Common Prayer including the articles which were finalized as 39 under the reign of Elizabeth I, in 1571 (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thirty-nine-Articles). Cranmer determined that the Anglican church (i.e.: "church of the English") was separating politically, not apostolically, from the Roman church. This means that

A.) it still claimed descent from the original Apostles of Christ, and professed to believe and teach as they believed and taught;
B.) the church believed it was "sent out" just as the original Apostles were, to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God through Christ, to all people ("Apostle" could be translated as "Ambassador" or "Representative". The Apostles were the Ambassadors for Christ).

Believing and teaching as the original Apostles did, especially those who sat at Christ's feet, has been very important to the church since the beginning – there were many controversies and arguments ever since Paul wrote the epistles we have in the New Testament, and there still are some today. Why is this so important? How can you understand, as best as possible, what Christ taught, and what the 1st disciples understood His teaching to be?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 275: The Book of Common Prayer

Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer has four main parts:

1. Worship Liturgies
2. Daily, Weekly, and Yearly readings
3. Prayer
4. 39 Articles

Liturgy means "a work for the public good". In the Roman Empire, aqueducts, sewers, and streets were all liturgical works. The original church fathers labelled their services as liturgical because they are intended to be a.) public, and b.) for the good (the health) of those who take advantage of them. In other words, they are expressions of love – love to God and love for those who attend. Cranmer included these in English (the "common tongue") to allow every person in the land to understand and be able to attend them (previously, they were kept within the domain of the clergy, those whose vocation it is to support and guide the church, and written (and said) in Latin, which "common people" could no longer understand). Cranmer was saying that all four sections were important: daily, weekly, and yearly worship, ongoing reading of the bible, ongoing prayer, and truly understanding the faith. One final note: almost everything in the liturgies, the readings, and the prayers, can be directly traced to, or is an allusion to, somewhere in the bible. In many ways, the traditional worship and prayers of the Anglican Church are living embodiments of the bible itself. The rest of this week (and next week), we shall look at the 39 articles to understand them a bit better (note that the original wording has been extensively paraphrased in what follows to give it a more modern context – the non-paraphrased words start on page 698 of the Book of Common Prayer).

When you are worshiping using a traditional Anglican service, you are enveloped in, embodying, and living out the bible. How does this make you feel?

Share your feelings as you like.

Day 276: There is one God – and God is complicated.

There is only one God. Infinite in power, wisdom, goodness. Unchanging in love. Maker of everything. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Son: Godhead and Manhood joined together in One. Truly suffered, truly died. Sacrificed for all the sins of humanity.

Went to hell.

Resurrected, will return to judge all.

THE Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

The first five articles define, as far as we are willing to, God.

This is what we understand God to be: infinite, unchanging, originator. Three persons in one being. One person, the Son, joined God and humanity physically together. In every respect encountered life as we encounter it – and in every respect, knows life as God knows it. In the Son, God gave of Himself so that all separation between humans and God was obliterated.

The Son went to hell (as per day 262) then was resurrected, and, having endured everything we ourselves endure and knowing us better than we know ourselves, will judge all people for ability to live with God in totality for eternity (which is God's deepest desire).

The Holy Spirit, through which we ourselves interact with God, is itself a full part of God.

God alone is God – there is no other. Arguments about God are like the ant debates (see the article "Ants used to be so superstitious!") – there is one God, and this is how we understand God to be.

How would you define God in comparison to how God is defined in the 39 articles?

Share your definition with those you trust, if appropriate.

Day 277: Of belief

The Bible contains everything needed for salvation. Anything outside of holy scripture is not needed for salvation.

The Old Testament is not contrary to the new. In both testaments, everlasting life is offered by Christ. The moral commandments in both are binding to Christians.

The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasius Creed describe the Holy Faith as understood from scripture.

Do you want to know what you need for eternal life? Read your bible (maybe refer back to Week 18 for approaches on this). Does someone say you need to do something for eternal life which is not contained in the bible? Don't believe them.

Does the Old Testament have a lot of different things than the New? Yes. Are they contrary to each other? No. In both, Christ asks us to walk in love as He loves us. In both, people are struggling (and failing in many ways) to live the simple life of love which God pleads us to live. This is a simple life, but not easy. It is the same God, and we are the same people. Do we understand both testaments 100%? No – for currently, we see through a glass darkly, but in the time to come we shall be face to face.

The three Creeds give more details regarding the nature of God and our salvation. These Creeds may be found in the Book of Common Prayer. The Apostles' Creed arose out of the questioning of baptismal candidates by the local bishop and is considered the first creed. The Nicene Creed was established to define common belief amongst Christians when it was written (at the First Council of Nicaea in 325). The Athanasian Creed is thought to have been written in the 5th century (sometime in the 400's), to elaborate on the nature of God).

Do you believe anything about God (or your salvation) which is not found in the bible? Describe how the New Testament may be a continuation of the Old, and not contrary to its ultimate message. What IS the ultimate message of the Bible and of your faith (in a sentence or two)?

Share the ultimate message of your faith with those you love.

Day 278: Of separation from God

Sin (missing the mark of God's holiness) is the fault and corruption of every human. Humans are inclined to do evil contrary to the Spirit of God. It is through the grace of God in Christ that we can do good which pleases God.

We are righteous before God only by the gift of forgiveness and salvation through Christ. We cannot "earn" our way to God's kingdom. Our works, no matter how good, are not good enough to allow us to approach God in God's holiness – however, God delights in them as the fruit of our faith. We need to be careful that we don't become arrogant or self-worshiping due to the works that we do.

Everyone misses the mark of God's holiness, except Christ alone. This is the only way in which the humanity of Christ is separate from that of our own. Jesus the Christ is the lamb without blemish. The rest of us offend in many ways, and we must own that. Whether we have been baptized or not, we are still subject to missing the mark of God's holiness (i.e.: sin),and must return to Christ again for forgiveness after each time. We must not be arrogant that we are "better" than others because we have been baptised and they have not – rather, we must be humbled by this blessing in which God has explicitly accepted us into His family, and strive to follow His path of love and forgiveness.

How have you missed the mark of God's holiness this week?

Talk with God about this, and receive His forgiveness.

Day 279: Salvation

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Everlasting Life is the purpose of God. God calls us through his Holy Spirit, we through the Grace of Christ obey this calling, are accepted in forgiveness, are adopted into the family of Chris,t and, being made like His Image, copy Christ in good works and by God's mercy enjoy everlasting life. Rejoicing in our salvation and focusing on the Path of Life (as given through Holy Scripture), our love for God is kindled and brought to life.

It is in Christ alone that we receive Salvation, not through obedience to rules or our own efforts. You cannot be received by God without meeting God.

Describe your relationship with Christ.

Share with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 280: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.