Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Understanding ourselves – Week 41

The 39 Articles, continued

Day 281. The Church

19. *The church is an assembly of faithful people where the Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are received.*

20. *The church may establish ceremonies and rites and decide on controversies of faith, yet it should not do or decree anything contrary to what is given in Scripture, nor preach a part of Scripture which is not upheld by the rest of Scripture.*

21. & 22. *At times, the church has erred, even to understanding of God – therefore, all should be shown how it is aligned with Holy Scripture before it is accepted. For example, purgatory is not found in scripture.*

The church is people gathered together – people who believe in God, who hear the Word of God preached, and who receive the Sacraments. As the body of Christ, it is to define proper ceremonies to grow and encourage its people and also decide on controversies within itself as to what most closely follows Loving God and Loving Your neighbour. It shouldn't do anything contrary to its Foundational Document, the Bible – nor should it align with one part of the Bible which appears contrary to the rest of the Bible.

The church makes mistakes! A good litmus test to check against what the church is deciding is "how does this reflect against what is taught in the bible (meaning the bible overall, not just a specific sentence or paragraph)?"

What if we can't agree what the bible is teaching? Or if we don't agree with what "the church" is proclaiming?

For that, please review our previous conversations about reading the bible. Pray, pray, and pray. Approach conversations around such disagreements with the Fruit of the Spirit and the presence of Shalom, as much as you can. Uphold those you disagree with. Listen to them intently. Try to learn and try to share your understanding in a spirit of peace.

The church has made many mistakes, and the church will make more mistakes, because the church is people. This is why Jesus emphasized forgiveness and love. As we explore life and being together, it is important to keep what is foundational as foundational – love God with all you are and love each other as you love yourself. Always seek what is healthiest and you will find that is what pleases God the most as well. How can you approach your fellow explorers in forgiveness and love? Are there items which would be healthier to do in a way that is different than how they are currently being done?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 282: Sacraments

23. & 24. No one should preach or preside over the Sacraments unless they are lawfully accepted by the church as having been duly called by God, as judged by those who have authority. All worship should be held in a language understandable by the people worshiping.

25. Sacraments are not tokens but actual workings of God's grace. Christ ordained Baptism and Holy Communion. Confirmation, Penance, Holy Orders, Matrimony, and extreme Unction (Last Rites) were not ordained by Christ but are of human invention (though not contrary to Scripture). Sacraments are not to be worshiped in themselves, but used as means of receiving the Holy Spirit.

26. Those who receive the Sacraments are not dependent upon the Godliness of those administering them, for the Sacrament to be effective, as the Sacraments are works of Christ and not of humans. The church in the world has evil mingled with the good. If someone in authority is found to have done evil, such shall be suitably investigated, appropriately judged, and sentenced.

It is important that the person who preaches does so with wisdom and love, both encouraging the people and drawing them into a closer relationship with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Such a person needs special gifting, training, and authorization.

It is important the person presiding over a Sacrament understands how God wishes to work in the Sacrament and can so enact it that God's will is done, and the people are blessed. Such a person needs special gifting, training, and authorization.

Worship should be in the common tongue of those attending so people can understand with their mind as well as their hearts. Sacraments (outward and visible signs of inward and invisible Grace) are real workings of the Holy Spirit, vehicles we use to participate with the Holy Spirit in its desires – they are not dependent on the moral worthiness of the person presiding, and they are not to be worshiped as things unto themselves.

In the current world, people of the church can do evil as well as good – and if we in the church do evil, that should be investigated, appropriately judged, and consequences given.

The church has recognized specific acts as sacramental, in which God does something. Most significant of these are Baptism and Holy Communion. What do you think God does in Holy Communion? Are there specific actions in your life where you encountered the movement of the Holy Spirit (whether you had emotions associated with it or not)? What are your thoughts on the sharing of today?

Share as you like.

Day 283: Baptism and Holy Communion

27. *Baptism is an explicit separation from the World, a sign of regeneration or new birth, a grafting into the church, the promise of the forgiveness of sin, adoption into the Family of Christ through the Holy Spirit, a confirmation of Faith and the Grace of God. Baptism of young children is agreeable to the will of Christ ("let the children come to Me").*

28. *Holy Communion is a sign of the love that Christians ought to share with each other, a Sacrament of our Redemption through the death of Christ. The bread we break is to partake of the Body of Christ, the cup we drink is to partake of the Blood of Christ. The Body and Blood are given, taken, and eaten in a heavenly and spiritual manner, through Faith. Hypothesizing physical changes misses the point.*

29. *Unbelievers or those who are wicked and partake of Holy Communion, though they go through the motions, do not really partake of Christ.*

30. *The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to lay-people – both parts should be offered to all Christians alike.*

31. *The Offering of Christ (upon the cross) is the full and perfect redemption, atoning sacrifice, and resolving of God's Holiness for all the sins of the whole world, and nothing else suffices. Holy Communion is not a re-sacrifice of Christ, but a Holy Remembrance and partaking of the original and only sacrifice.*

Baptism and Holy Communion are very important – the church has argued intensely as to their meaning over the centuries. We've already talked about Baptism a fair bit. In Holy Communion, some people argue that the bread and wine physically change in some way – Cranmer (basically) said "that misses the point – we eat of Christ and we drink of Christ, as He commanded at the Last Supper." He also said that receiving Christ depends on the belief of the receiver – going through the motions doesn't make it real. For a believer, as the molecules of bread and wine become a part of every one of their cells, Christ Himself spiritually re-becomes a part of them and they of He. We are redeemed, we are changed, we are healed. We re-partake of His death and resurrection, and rise again from the altar as new human beings.

What is your understanding of Holy Communion?

Share your understanding with those you trust.

Day 284: Of Traditions and Ceremonies

32. *Clergy are not commanded in the bible not to marry, therefore they may (or not) as they desire.*

33. *People who are excommunicated from the church (banished) are to be treated as non-believers unless they are openly repentant and reconcile through being accepted by a person given such authority.*

34. *Traditions and ceremonies across the church do not need to be identical but may be adjusted to the needs of the local context. Any person who intentionally breaks the traditions and ceremonies as celebrated by their local church, though those ceremonies be aligned with the Word of God and approved by church authority, should be openly rebuked as offending against orderliness, authority, and causing those who are weaker to fall away.*

    Every diocese has authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites which are ordained only by human authority, so that all things be done to build up and educate.

35. *Homilies (Sermons) should have godly and wholesome doctrine as necessary for the time they are given, and be given diligently and distinctly, that they be understood by the people.*

36. *The Book of Common Prayer contains everything necessary for the Consecration and Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons and nothing superstitious or ungodly. Whoever is ordained according to the rites of that book are rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated and ordered.*

Ceremonies and traditions across the church are of critical importance – they enact what we believe in a way which uses all the senses. Because they are so important, they may be adjusted to the local context, but should not be a free-for-all as to what they contain. Any ceremonies need to be properly examined and then authorized (in our case, by the Diocesan Bishop).

Do you agree that worship ceremonies should be regulated? Why or why not? Should there be boundaries to such regulation? If so, what do you suggest? Any other comments regarding today's articles?

Share your thoughts with those you love.

Day 285: Regarding Authority

37. *Civil authorities do not have the role of ministering God's Word or the Sacraments, but rather to rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God (Ecclesiastical or Temporal) and restrain evil doers.*

    Other ecclesiastical authorities (Roman, Orthodox, etc.) do not have jurisdiction over the Anglican Church.

    Christians are subject to the laws of the country, including penalties, wearing weapons, and serving in war.

38. *Christian people's goods are privately owned. However, Christians should liberally share with the poor and needy as they are able to.*

39. *While vain and rash swearing is forbidden, a Christian my give an oath when a Legal Magistrate requires it for justice, judgement, and truth.*

In Cranmer's time there was a huge debate as to who had ultimate authority: the ruler(s) of the country, or the leader(s) of the church (it would have been between the King, or the Pope)? In naming himself as head of the church, King Henry VIII was explicitly stating "I have the authority – no one else." In these last articles, Cranmer was writing that people within the church are still subject to the laws of the land and cannot use their presence in Christ's body to avoid those laws – if they do, they should expect the ramifications of their disobedience as citizens of that country. This means that we should be deliberate and take the consequences into account, for sometimes we do judge we need to follow God rather than society (as per Acts 5:29).

Share as you feel guided.

Day 286: The 39 Articles

As described here and last week, the 39 articles have been split into the following sections:

- 1-5 There is one God – and God is complicated
- 6-8 Of belief
- 9-16 Of separation from God
- 17-18 Salvation
- 19-22 The Church
- 23-26 The Sacraments
- 27-31 Baptism and Holy Communion
- 32-36 Traditions and Ceremonies
- 37-39 Regarding Authority

Christians are not instantly "created" – we are people who have received a revelation from God that we are loved, created in God's Image, redeemed by Christ, risen again in Him, and intended for eternal life with God. That we are forgiven and that indeed, we can turn from death to life, from dark to light, from despair to love. That we have abundant life. The 39 articles are not meant to be all-encompassing, but rather are a skeleton to indicate what we need to know as we embrace this faith.

As you read through the 39 articles, what struck you as being especially significant to you and your faith in Christ? Are there any areas you would like to investigate further or address more fully in your life?

Share with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 287: 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.