

7 Shared Convictions #4-7 The Church: Belief, Behaviour and Belonging

Mark 10:35-45 By Patty Friesen (Oct. 20/24)

In today's gospel reading from Mark 10 Jesus asks the brothers James and John if they are able to participate in his suffering as well as his glory. Since greatness and power was a topic of contention among them, the other disciples become angry with James and John. What Jesus says about authority and discipleship makes the rejection of power and status in the new community clear. The new collaborative community of Christ will not be a quest for status and glory. Thankfully, the failures of the disciples during Jesus' lifetime are not the final word about their faithfulness. Although they will run away during the crucifixion, these same disciples will later share the cup of suffering of Jesus in their own martyrdom.

This is our 3rd and last sermon in our intergenerational faith exploration trilogy this month using the tool of the 7 Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists. The deacons will meet with the youth today to share their faith and baptism stories for anyone else who wants to hear them. Another tool we have for faith exploration today is Stuart Murray from the United Kingdom who wrote *The Naked Anabaptist* 24 years ago (hold up) to global enthusiastic response and renewed interest in Anabaptism worldwide. He used the term *The Naked Anabaptist* to describe the early Dutch Anabaptists who ran through the streets of Amsterdam naked in order to show they carried no weapons. He basically distilled the shared convictions of Global Anabaptists #4-7 in terms of what we believe, how we behave and how we belong - slide.

#4 As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience. (**Belief**)

#5 The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need. (**Behaviour**)

#6. We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability. (**Belonging**)

Stuart Murray posed that in the old days Anabaptists had to believe everything perfectly and behave perfectly before we could be baptized and belong to the church. Nowadays he says adults and children develop a sense of **belonging** - by participating in worship, open table communion and bible study which leads to **belief** in God and Jesus, which in turn shapes our **behaviour**. Working with new Anabaptist converts in the UK who started with belonging to an Anabaptist community before they came to believe in Christ, Murray has helped North American Anabaptists to open up our communion to non-members and has helped us become more intentional in our behaviour and more vocal about our belief.

Stuart Murray has now written a sequel to The Naked Anabaptist called The New Anabaptists: Practices for Emerging Communities. Murray, of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network in the United Kingdom, says Anabaptism is unusually suitable for a society that has moved into what he calls post-Christendom - meaning that the majority of people in Europe and North America no longer call themselves Christian and countries and institutions like schools, colleges, hospitals that used to identify

specifically as Christian, no longer do so. In this absence or de-constructing of traditional Christianity rises a hunger for friendship, community and peace-making practices as expressed in Anabaptism.

Neo-Anabaptists, like early Anabaptists, prioritize the life and teachings of Jesus. In the words of Palmer Becker in his book *Anabaptist Essentials* “Jesus is the centre of our faith. Anabaptists worship a risen Christ. By placing Jesus at the centre of our faith, we view the rest of Scripture through the lens of Jesus, the fullest revelation of God.” This is what we believe.

We practice baptism as a pledge to discipleship to Christ and active participation in the church community. We practice communion as a peace-meal; remembering the peacemaking work of Jesus, through which we are not only reconciled to God, but also to each other across all that would divide us. At this shared meal we can reaffirm our commitment to each other and to a peaceful community. (p. 65). When we share the peace-meal communion, we are looking in several directions. We look **back** to God’s amazing acts of peacemaking through Jesus. We look **up** to God as reconciled human beings. We look **forward** to the great banquet when all will be reconciled. We look **around** at our diverse table companions and commit ourselves afresh to be at peace with each other. And we look **out** onto a warring world and commit ourselves afresh to be peacemakers. (P, 69). This is how we behave.

Shared meals in homes and food-based hospitality is shaping the church where real friendship rather than formal membership binds people together (p.71). When Stuart Murray and Alan Kreider interviewed British and Irish Anabaptists - the majority of them said they had become attracted to Anabaptism because of Mennonite cookbooks!

Way to go Simply in Season, More with Less and Mennonite Community Cookbook - 3 generations of cookbooks mostly by Anabaptist women, reflecting our values of healthy, simple, local, in season food.

Murray also says UK Anabaptists are attracted to the practices of multi-voiced worship with multiple speakers and congregational singing instead of priests, preachers and cantors. Neo-Anabaptists are attracted to bible studies where everyone is working at interpretation of scripture not just pastors, priests and professors. UK Neo-Anabaptists work at living simply and decluttering their houses and schedules of stuff. This is how we belong.

Neo-Anabaptists work at pacifism and evangelism both. The earliest Anabaptists were so vocal in their testimonies that tongue screws were used to silence them. Dutch Anabaptist Margaret Hellwart, was repeatedly chained to the kitchen floor to prevent her from sharing her faith with her neighbours. Various reasons have been suggested as to why the Anabaptist tradition retained its commitment to nonviolence but lost its evangelistic passion. Severe persecution no doubt played a part and in some places, tolerance was achieved at the expense to agreements not to evangelize. Cultural assimilation accepted the idea that Anabaptist faith is a private matter and self-effacing humility is averse to pressuring people with our message. We witness by our lifestyle. Authenticity is crucial to ethical evangelism.(p. 136-137)

Christian involvement in holy wars, slavery, residential schools, financial corruption, oppression of minorities, psychological manipulation and abuse of power are a few of the many reasons people are not attracted to Christianity. We have to acknowledge this shameful legacy. A decolonizing post-Christendom evangelism

suggests we share our failures and personal disasters rather than spiritual victories. Honesty about past and present personal and corporate failings accompanied by a lifestyle that is decluttered and cares about creation invites further conversations about the difference Jesus makes in our personal and congregational lives.

What do we say about Jesus? We say his human life and teachings are essential aspects of the gospel. We don't ask "why did Jesus die?" but "Why was he killed?" This question alerts us to the social impact of his life and death and precludes an over-spiritualized, privatized form of evangelism that promotes Jesus only as my personal Saviour and best friend who solves all my problems. While this happens to be true in my personal experience - the historical Jesus refuses to be distilled down to the personal dramas of Patty Friesen.

Ethical evangelism means inviting without inducing. The gospel is both attractive and demanding. It acknowledges the cost of discipleship alongside the benefits of faith. Ethical evangelism means persuading without pressuring and honouring friendships for what we humbly learn from them from people who are different from us. Ethical evangelism inspires my annual participation in Pride Parade. You wouldn't believe the attention we straggly group of Mennonites bring to Pride. It seems to turn all kinds of heads around - Mennonite heads and Pride heads. Every year someone exclaims loudly - "I can't believe the Mennonites are here" and people take pictures of us like we are exotic animals escaped from the zoo! Ethical evangelism invites questions like what are you Mennonites doing at Pride Parade? (P. 142-143).

At OMC we have hosted parking lot events on July 1 that have also invited interest and questions from the community through our Sask Electric Vehicle show and

Artisan Market. Why are you hosting this? people ask. Why do you care about local artists? Why do you care about green energy? Why do you care about gay people? Why do you care about disabled people? Why do you care about Indigenous treaty rights? Why do you care about recycling material and sewing blankets for refugees? Why do you get together so often to eat so much and why do you eat so much when you get together? Why do you cook at camp? Why do you sing? Why do you care about anything other than yourself and your own immediate family?

We have a rich attractive spiritual heritage that we take for granted. People genuinely want to know what makes us tick. On this 500th anniversary year of Anabaptism, we have been re-examining and re-imagining the practices of our faith - what to hold onto and what to release. A verse for this 500th year could be Jeremiah 6:16, "Stand at the crossroads and look, and ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way lies and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." That would be a good verse on our marquee at the crossroads of Second Street and 3rd Avenue as an invitation to come check us out.

Slide 2 - #7 Shared Conviction - As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

The largest number of Anabaptists now live in the Majority World, in Africa and Asia. Many of you in the generation just ahead of me have lived and worked overseas and I love how your experiences in Asia and Africa and South America continue to

shape your worldview and faith. For those of us who haven't lived in another country, Doris Janzen Longacre in *Living More with Less* suggests that we in North America learn from the world by going to ethnic restaurants and trying new food, going to Saskatoon Folkfest, reading authors from other countries, going to the Mennonite World Conferences, sponsoring refugees and volunteering at Global Gathering or Saskatoon Open Door Society. Our lives and church are enriched by what we learn from the rest of the world. We look forward to Jeanette Hanson from Mennonite Church Canada International Witness together with Chinese Mennonite Pastor Yin Hongtao, coming November 3 to share what Anabaptism looks like in China.

Let us pray...Thank you God for the church - imperfect as we are but striving to become more like the people you want us to be. Help us in this endeavour to create belonging, belief and behaviour in our community that reflects you. Amen.