

EPISCOPAL-NESS: FROM THE BEGINNING

A FIVE-SUNDAY LOOK AT OUR ORIGIN, FAITH, AND PRACTICE

by Christina Brennan Lee <http://prayersofthepeople.blogspot.com>

Outline #1

Henry the VIIIth and all THAT - who started this Church anyway?

[Total time 1 hour] Props for this session: Book of Common Prayer for participants, Handouts 1-3

~ [8-10 min] **Opening Purpose of this series:** Whether you are a “cradle Episcopalian,” from another faith tradition, or just new to Christianity and/or Church, these discussions will look at the Episcopal Church in the US, its roots in the Anglican Communion traditions, theology, and, how our Liturgy and other spiritual practices unfold, hopefully encouraging each of us to know and live *consciously* with God beyond Sundays.

~ **Purpose of this session:** a VERY LITTLE bit of early Church history

~ **Introductions, Self and Participants, what brings you here in one brief sentence.**

~ [7-8 min] **So, as to who started the Church - why Jesus, of course, but then what does that really mean?** distribute handout #1, from BCP “The Church” read aloud in succession, discuss, any surprises, anything new?

- Let's define what “The Church” is. We'll start with the Catechism, how many know the Episcopal Church has one and where it is? It is contained in EVERY Book of Common Prayer. The official name is *An Outline of the Faith* and it begins on page 844 with an explanation of what it is. [show BCP p 844] On pages 854-855 is the Episcopal understanding of The Church: [Leader asks participants to take turns reading the questions and answers]

Q. What is the Church?

A. The Church is the community of the New Covenant.

Q. How is the Church described in the Bible?

A. The Church is described as the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members. It is called the People of God, the New Israel, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of truth.

Q. How is the Church described in the creeds?

A. The Church is described as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

Q. Why is the Church described as one?

A. The Church is one, because it is one Body, under one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Q. Why is the Church described as holy?
- A. The Church is holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, consecrates its members, and guides them to do God's work.
- Q. Why is the Church described as catholic?
- A. The Church is catholic, because it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time.
- Q. Why is the Church described as apostolic?
- A. The Church is apostolic, because it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and is sent to carry out Christ's mission to all people.
- Q. What is the mission of the Church?
- A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.
- Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?
- A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.
- Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?
- A. The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

~ Now we know that Jesus started the Church when he said [2-3 min]:

- *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Mt 16:18*

Shortly after that Jesus said to Peter:

- *Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things. Mt 16:23*

Then, following that, Peter denied Jesus 3 times, Jesus died and was resurrected to the Kingdom of Heaven in about the year 30 C.E. (used to be called A.D. *Anno Domini*, Latin for The Year of Our Lord, and now is the Common Era, another discussion for another time). The Church was then in the hands of Peter and his successors, in other words, human beings who disagree, sometimes violently, over everything.

~ [30 min] [Ask:] **When did the Church of England begin?** [after brief discussion if it doesn't come up ask how many think it was by Henry the 8th - distribute handout #2 - follow with brief recount of the following, skipping as necessary in the interest of time]

The Beginnings of the Church in England:

We fast forward through centuries of development of the Gospels and Epistles (The New Testament), arguments, persecutions, heresies, Councils, Popes, Anti-Popes, Schisms, the Crusades, Conversion missions, etc., to The Reader's Digest version of Church History in England:

- 1st - 2nd Century, Christianity arrives in Britain, southern Britain becomes part of Roman Empire
- St. Patrick converts Ireland and St. Benedict was in Italy writing his Rule in the 5th Century
- St. David converts Wales and St. Columba went to Scotland in the 6th century
- St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to England in 597 is seen as the formal establishment of the Church of England**
- Saxon cathedral built on the site of the current St. Paul's in London in the 7th century
- Synod of Whitby in 664 united Celtic Christianity in the British Isles with Roman Catholicism**

By the 16th Century most Christians in Western Europe accepted the Pope (Bishop of Rome) as the head of the Church even though some, such as those who follow, had serious concerns about corruption:

- John Wycliffe, 14th Century England, 1st to complete translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English in 1380-82, preached anti-Catholic views of sacraments, denied Transubstantiation
- John of Wessel, 15th Century German, opposed sale of indulgences, also denied Transubstantiation
- Girolamo Savonarola, 15th Century Italian priest, preached against papal immorality (anyone watch HBO's *The Borgias*? Savonarola is portrayed)
- Desiderius Erasmus, 15th Century Dutch Humanist, attacked Church hypocrisy, compiled the Greek NT later used by Martin Luther

None of them came to a good end. Then comes the flood gates of *The Protestant Reformation* thrown wide open by

- **Martin Luther**, German Augustinian monk, translated Bible into German, railed against the sale of indulgences for salvation, sale of Church offices, nepotism in the Church, the veneration of relics, etc., posting his 95 Theses (disputes) in 1517, excommunicated in 1520, married in 1525

Many others followed over the next 100 years: Zwingli, Calvin, Knox...

~ THEN: Enter Henry VIII, King of England, 1509-1547

- Considered a usurper of the throne by supporters of Richard III who Henry 7th (8th's father) defeated in the battle that killed Richard. Also known as Yorkists.

- H 8th was Second son - older brother was heir but died at age 15 - H 7th insisted H 8th marry brother's widow, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, and received Papal dispensation to override one biblical injunction against such a marriage which occurred after H 7th's death; H 8th was 17
- Later, at nearly 40 years of age, desperate for male heir to maintain succession, H 8th felt marriage was cursed for fulfilling Lev 20:21 that unclean marriages would be childless (although he had a daughter, it wasn't enough)
- Built solid? biblical case for annulment but wife's nephew, powerful King of Spain, objected and Pope, afraid of Spain, was prevented from granting request. See Lev 20:21, Deut 25:5
- More than 4 years passed with ecclesial court haggling til Archbishop Cranmer (appointed by H 8th) along with Parliament declared the marriage null and void and ended England's relationship with the Church of Rome (til daughter Mary Tudor came to the throne)
- NO DOCTRINAL CHANGES, changes in worship, nor the governance of the church changed under H 8th - only that Henry was head of the Church of England, not the Pope.
- Parliament passed the Six Articles Act of 1539 (written by H 8th) asserting the truth of Transubstantiation, communion in one kind was lawful, clergy to remain unmarried [even though Cranmer was secretly married!], the importance of private masses and sacramental confession, etc. DEALT A BLOW to the Protestant reformers
- By 1536, H 8th ordered a copy of the Bible in Latin AND in English to be placed in every church, Roman Mass continued, the Book of Common Prayer not yet written.
- Henry VIII did NOT found a new church though with bad advice he did serious damage to the reputation of The Church through its suppression/devastation of monasteries and other houses of monastic and religious observance and churches, particularly - but not just - those who maintained allegiance to Rome, to claim their alleged wealth - some were wealthy, some were very poor. Many of those houses were not without their own corruption and abuses however most were brutally destroyed under H 8th's orders. The architect of this and other bad decisions, including the lies that resulted in Anne Boleyn, etc., executions, was Thomas Cromwell, also later executed. Archbishop Cranmer, a secret Reformer, was ultimately executed by Mary Tudor.

~ The current operating beliefs of the Episcopal Church are contained in the Catechism along with Historical Documents, BCP p 864, also listed in the BCP, agreed upon and revisited regularly by various conferences and conventions including the 39 *Articles of Religion* from 1801, BCP, p 867-76, (derived from Cranmer's work) - **no one is required to believe or accept** these in order to be a member of this Church as the content evolves and changes as does Theology and Biblical study through new historical discoveries and scholarship. [Discussion for as long as time allows].

~ **For next week's discussion** *What's the Difference Between Church and Religion?* ponder your thoughts on Belief and Faith [distribute handout #3 "Definitions of Belief and Faith"]. We'll also pick up our brief History with the establishment of the Episcopal Church in the US.

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Handout #2

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~ **THEN**: Enter Henry VIII, King of England, reigned 1509-1547, starting at age 17, died at 55

Defining Belief and Faith

Be·lief [[be leéf](#)] (plural be·liefs) noun **Definitions:**

- 1. acceptance of truth of something:** acceptance by the mind that something is true or real, often underpinned by an emotional or spiritual sense of certainty
 - *belief in an afterlife*
- 2. trust:** confidence that somebody or something is good or will be effective
 - *belief in democracy*
- 3. something that somebody believes in:** a statement, principle, or doctrine that a person or group accepts as true
- 4. opinion:** an opinion, especially a firm and considered one
- 5. religious faith:** faith in God or in a religion's gods

[12th century. Alteration of Old English *gelēafa* after *believe*]

Faith [[fayth](#)] (plural faiths) noun **Definitions:**

- 1. belief or trust:** belief in, devotion to, or trust in somebody or something, especially without logical proof
 - *I wouldn't put my faith in him to straighten things out.*
- 2. religion or religious group:** a system of religious belief, or a group who adhere to it
- 3. trust in God:** belief in and devotion to God
 - *Her faith is unwavering.*
- 4. set of beliefs:** a strongly held set of beliefs or principles
 - *people of different political faiths*
- 5. loyalty:** allegiance or loyalty to somebody or something
 - from the 13th century; via Old French *feid*: Latin *fides* [*fee dess/fee dees*], *fidelis/fidelity*, "trust, belief"
- 6. keep faith with somebody or something** to be loyal or true to a person or promise
- 7. on faith** without demanding proof