

June 25, 2017  
The Future Church: Part 2  
James 2:14-18

If you were here last week, you'll remember that I spoke about how our society has changed from a modern worldview to a postmodern worldview. That's had a big impact on the church. I know there was some intellectually heavy stuff in that sermon. The main point though is this: it's not just the church that has been experiencing a time of change. It's society itself that is changing, and in some really important ways.

These big changes have a big impact on the church.

My argument is that many of these changes might actually be a good thing for the church. They can help push us toward a more real, more profound kind of Anabaptist Christianity. And that kind of faith is something our world really needs.

If you'll permit me a little sidebar here, just in case you're not sure what this word "Anabaptist" means, it refers to a certain branch of Christianity. Anabaptism started in the early 1500s as a reform movement that broke away from the Catholic Church. The Anabaptists wanted to see change happen in the church, and they believed that Protestants like Martin Luther didn't go far enough in changing things. Anabaptism is often called "the Third Way" of Christianity, because it's different from both Catholicism and Protestantism. But enough about that for the moment. What's important for you to know is that all of today's Mennonites can trace our beliefs back to these early Anabaptists.

Today I'm going to talk about 3 core beliefs of Anabaptists, and how these beliefs really resonate today in our postmodern world. Theologian Palmer Becker writes about these 3 beliefs in his new book, "Anabaptist Essentials: 10 Signs of a Unique Faith."

So let's dive right into it.

First: Anabaptists believe that Jesus is the centre of our faith.

Last week I said that each person has a particular worldview, a particular way of seeing and making sense out of the world. This is a key learning from postmodernity. The way in which you and I see and understand the world, our worldview, has a huge impact upon how we live- for better and for worse. My worldview will impact the choices I make and how I interact with other people. And so will yours.

Anabaptist Christians believe that Jesus is the centre of our faith. That means they view Jesus as the ultimate authority for their lives. You could say they see the world through Jesus coloured glasses. When Anabaptists read the Bible, they hold the life and teachings of Jesus as the key for interpreting everything else. If they find a difficult passage in the Old Testament, for example, they try to understand it in light of what they know to be true about Jesus from the New Testament. They believe that Jesus is the

fullest revelation of God. Jesus is God, coming into the world as a human being in order to have a relationship with us. So everything about how Anabaptists live and interact in the world, and even how they read the Bible, is guided by Jesus.

This is also important because it means that Anabaptists don't worship the Bible: they worship Jesus. The Bible is important because it teaches about who Jesus is. When they're trying to make sense out of what the Bible teaches, they look at what we learn there about Jesus and use that as their guide.

Postmodernity says that our lives are guided by our worldview.  
Anabaptism says our worldview is guided by Jesus.

Second: Anabaptists believe that community is the centre of our life.

For the early Anabaptists, their lives depended upon each other. They were hunted and persecuted because of their beliefs, so they often had to flee as refugees to wherever they could find places of safety. They believed Jesus taught them to share their material possessions with whoever was in need. And they had to practice that, because they had to share whatever resources they had with each other in order to survive.

They often lived together in small communities. Their church gatherings were usually small, and they met wherever they could find a safe place- sometimes in a barn, sometimes in a cave. Worship was simple. It was about coming together and being with God. They didn't need fancy churches or nice sound systems, because they had God, and they had each other.

Anabaptist Christians today are trying to rediscover what it means to have community. In the Postmodern world, community has been broken. Families are fragmented as children move away from home to get an education and find work. People are busy, but lonely. Everyone is working longer hours with less time to just hang out and be together. There are a lot of lonely people out there.

I remember back when I was just starting my first year at the University of Toronto going to seminary, Natalia was about 3, and both me and Billy were in school full time, and I got sick with scarlet fever. It was awful. I made it to the doctor and got a prescription for penicillin, but when I went to Shoppers they were totally out, if you can believe that- a pharmacy with no penicillin! By the time I realized how sick I was, Billy had already left for school. I could barely get out of bed to look after Natalia. I remember thinking that there wasn't one single person I could call in the City of Toronto to ask for help. I just didn't know anybody.

A few years later when we moved to Leamington, both Billy and I got super sick at the same time- he got bronchitis and I got pneumonia. We had only been here for a few months and I felt like we didn't really know many people yet. And both of us were as sick as we'd ever been in our whole lives- for two weeks I could barely get out of bed. But I remember many of you brought amazing soup and homemade apple pie and all

things like that- it just magically showed up at our front door. Somebody even helped with picking Natalia from school for us. To me, this is the difference it makes being part of a church. It's like having a big extended family of people who are there for you when you need it. One of the ways we live this out is through our sharing and prayer time. We pray for each other about what we're going through, and those prayers tend to get followed up on with casseroles.

Postmodernity says that people are lonely.  
Anabaptism welcomes people into a community.

Third: Anabaptists believe reconciliation is the centre of our work.

"Reconciliation has to do with restoring relationships," according to theologian Palmer Becker. "It is the bringing together of persons, ideas, or accounts that have been in conflict."

Reconciliation is about making relationships right at every level: relationships with God, relationships between people, even relationships between people and the environment. Anabaptists believe that repentance is the key to healing and restoring broken relationships. When they repent, they take responsibility for the damage they've caused through their words and actions, and they commit themselves to doing things differently.

This week I celebrated National Aboriginal Day by attending a Women's Circle at the Caldwell First Nation. One of the women there, who is indigenous, shared that to her, repentance is the key to the Truth and Reconciliation movement. She says people and governments need to acknowledge the pain they have caused to indigenous people, and start actually doing things differently, in order to truly bring about reconciliation between settlers and indigenous communities. It's not enough to say I'm sorry using words, reconciliation means living differently. Anabaptists believe God's Holy Spirit gives them the strength and courage they need to take that step.

Postmodernity is good at pointing out the problems in the world.  
Anabaptism offers a path towards healing.

Anabaptism teaches that what we believe, what we do, and who we do it with matters. It's not enough to just know "facts" about God, or to just believe the right set of doctrines. It's not enough just to have knowledge about God in our heads.

How we live matters. Anabaptists believe we need to embody our faith in Jesus in every aspect of how we live. Being an Anabaptist Christian means working however we can to make the world a better place.

So these are the three core beliefs of Anabaptists, in the words of Palmer Becker: Jesus is the centre of our faith, community is the centre of our lives, and reconciliation is the centre of our work.

Do you consider yourself an Anabaptist? Maybe you're a Mennonite, but would you say that you're also an Anabaptist?

Is there something in you that connects with this way of being a Christian?

What would the Church look like, what would North Leamington United Mennonite Church look like, if we really commit ourselves to the Anabaptist kind of faith?

The old Anabaptist faith has a new appeal in today's postmodern world. Could it be that God is calling us back to rediscover our roots in a fresh new way?