

BMC May 21st 2023

Sermon & Series Wrap Up Statement:

As Jesus and Peter go their separate ways now and as you ponder their conversation, I thought I would say a few words to draw our short series on “Following Jesus as Anabaptists” to a close. We began this series with a reflection on the importance of “Roots” and “Wings;” roots to nourish us and wings to give us the freedom to try new ways of being church. Our Anabaptist and later Mennonite forebearers left us with important *roots* and we’ve examined just five of those roots over the last four Sundays. We learned about the importance of (1) believers Baptism for the early Anabaptists, how the transformation it attested to in their lives was so significant, they were willing even to risk their lives for it. We also reflected, however, on how our baptisms are not one-time events just to be remembered, but the beginning of a journey of following Jesus with the church that we must begin anew every day.

With Arnold Snyder as our guide, we learned about the Anabaptist emphasis on (2) the “new birth,” and the ways that new birth encouraged discipleship, and the pursuit of peace and justice in the day to day lives of believers. But we also acknowledged that the early Anabaptist emphasis on new birth might have been too optimistic at times, and that the new birth does not do away with the ongoing struggles and sins we deal with in this life. New birth, we learned, is also about being embraced again and again by the God of love and grace. Two weeks ago, we learned about (3) the rebellious side to the Anabaptist movement, that it was skeptical about the unchecked use of clerical and priestly authority in the church and in the world. We learned that early Anabaptists were therefore more open, especially early on, to a more expansive understanding of ministry and priesthood – a vocation that included all disciples of Jesus, regardless of gender or estate.

Last week we heard about (4) the Anabaptist devotion to scripture as a guide to living; how the early Anabaptists held illegal gatherings in caves to read scripture and sing hymns together. But we also heard how the caves eventually were traded for buildings, Bible schools and Universities through which Anabaptist leaders passed down the faith through inspiring new generations. Finally, with today's service, we've (5) reflected on Jesus' advice to believers regarding community accountability and finding ways to address conflict in the congregation.

As we've examined these roots over these last 5 Sundays, I hope we've begun to imagine ways these roots can continue to nourish us even as we've acknowledged that we need to innovate our tradition, to grow wings, and begin new adventures as disciples of Jesus. Indeed, on today's topic, history has taught us that while Anabaptists and later Mennonites highly valued community discipline and accountability, they often struggled to handle conflict well, with tendencies often leading either in the direction of avoiding conflict and accountability *or* handling conflict and accountability poorly with shaming, shunning, and excommunication, leading predictably to hurt and division. In worship response time, I hope there is an engaged discussion about how we might be innovative in our handling of conflict in the church today.

We've only scratched the surface of the history and theology of Anabaptism and what it could mean for us today. But Pentecost is coming, and so we end this series on Ascension Sunday. Last Thursday marked the day of Jesus' departure to heaven, beginning a new time for his disciples, the time God gives the church to live out Jesus' reconciling mission as his body. In Jesus' words from Matthew today, we read that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is with us. And so, we rejoice that going away Jesus has not left us, but is with us in the gathered community, the community called to bind up brokenness, the community that is bound with love. AMEN. I invite you to be seated as Howie sings our hymn of response, "God, Give Me Time."