

Mere Anglicanism

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2015

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] So if you look at this sheet, what we're going to do, we're going to try and do three things, which is way too much for you, just what you need on a hot Sunday evening. I'm going to talk a bit about denominations, historic Anglicanism in the 39 articles, and then I've got nine points for a quick close under mere Anglicanism.

And along the way, I want to mention a number of myths and false ideas. I'm going to do a little bit of history, where we came from as an Anglican church, and I'm going to have some excursions. Do they still do excursions in school? You know, you go out and see things around? Field trips, we'll do a couple of those. And my aim is that we might humbly understand and follow Jesus richly with our heritage and with our hope and with our hearts fixed on Christ.

So let me start with denominations. Can I start there? Anglicanism has a bad name. For starters, it comes from the word England.

And it gives off the idea that Christianity is a Western religion. Christianity came from the Middle East. And Christianity is far stronger in the developing world than it is in the West or Europe.

[1 : 27] For us in Canada, Anglicanism gives the idea of being old-fashioned, fusty, out of touch. People dressing up in strange gear and being pompous.

And the only time Anglicanism ever gets into the newspapers are when some newly elected bishop has openly denied something that Christians have always believed right throughout the world. You know, like Jesus didn't rise from the dead or that Jesus is not the only way to God. Do you know, there are a lot of people who think you cannot be a Christian and an Anglican at the same time.

This was a surprise to me. Roman and I, a few years ago, got given a trip to Israel with a group of pastors, Pentecostal, Baptist, Brethren, Salvation Army, pastors and wives.

They'd never had an Anglican on the tour before, for reasons I discovered later. During the first day, the conversations were really strange. Like they were just odd and I couldn't figure it out.

[2 : 30] Halfway through day two, I suddenly realised what was going on. They did not think I was a Christian. They were trying to evangelise me so that I would become a Christian.

It was great. So when I figured that out, I'm not sure it worked, but I figured it out. But what possible relevance could Anglicanism have to our postmodern culture?

I mean, come on, think about it. I mean, why should we have denominations at all, right? Shouldn't we just have one global church, one church of Jesus Christ around the world?

Shouldn't we all just come together and forget our differences and, as John Lennon said, all worship as one as long as I get to choose the music. I think there are two dangers for us when we start to talk about denominations.

The first is sectarianism. Sectarianism is the view that my denomination, my group, is the only true, the only real one in the neighborhood.

[3 : 34] And you have to belong to my denomination to be a true Christian. It's a form of tribalism, a factionalism. And you're always fighting and you're always pushing people out and it's ugly.

And one of the constant temptations of Christians throughout the ages, from the time Jesus rose again from the dead, is because we're passionately convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, we confuse the way we serve Jesus with the cause of Jesus.

And we become very committed to a particular style, a style of music or a style of youth ministry or a style of liturgy. In the past 10 years, I've met a lot of people who have come from sectarian churches and come into Anglicanism.

They've grown up in sectarian churches and when they discover there's 2,000 years of tradition and there's liturgy and Anglicanism, they become more Anglican than Anglicans and they import all their

sectarian thinking into the Anglican church and they say, if it's ancient and if it's old, it's got to be right.

But being ancient and old doesn't make something good or bad. You have to take everything to the scriptures. And tradition, which is very important for us to be humble before, tradition is really God's people over time seeking to understand the scriptures.

[5 : 00] So the first danger is sectarianism. The other danger is indifferentism. Indifferentism. That is, it just doesn't matter. I'm just a Christian.

I believe in Jesus. I don't belong to any brand. You hear people say, you know, love unites but doctrine divides. I don't want to argue. Why don't we all just get along?

You know, Jack Nicholson in *Mars Attacks* just before the Martians kill him. Little people, he says, why can't we all just get along? Then they kill him and they plant a Martian flag in his body.

The problem with indifference, there's a lot of problems with it, is that doctrine matters to God.

Jesus was passionate about doctrine. And doctrine is like the skeleton for your faith.

And if you don't have a skeleton, you're a jellyfish. You can be an evangelical fish. It doesn't really matter. I think of these two dangers.

[6 : 04] The one that's most a problem on the West Coast is indifferentism. This is very attractive. I belong to Jesus. I don't belong to an organ, you know, some institution. I don't care if it's Anglican, Presbyterian, Calathumpian.

I don't want to be tied down. I don't want to be labeled. I'm a free floater. Whether it's Baptist or Pentecostal, it's just what's good for me. And we're deeply infected by individualism and consumerism.

And you can see it. I know there's nobody here tonight like this, but you can see it in the church butterfly. You know the person who flits from one church to another depending on what's going on. They've got no commitment to the local church, but they take a little bit here and they have a little bit there, but they never settle down and serve sacrificially.

Or the consumer Christian who sees the church as a sort of a resource to my spiritual life. I'm here to take. I'm not here to give. So when things don't go my way or when there are real difficulties between you and other people in relationship, you're out the door.

And I've seen people like this over the years and they remain perpetually immature spiritually. They have a hollow, self-focused faith.

[7 : 18] And they only want to spend time with people who look like they do and talk like they do. There's also the passenger Christian, you know, the person who comes and sits in the bus. They easily sit at the back. Sorry to tell you.

They pay their fare. They're waiting for something better to come along. They get off at the stop. They turn up, but they never sign up to things. They wonder why they don't go forward in the Christian life. And there's another kind of Christian.

There's the cynical Christian who's grown skeptical of anything really good happening in a local church who looks down on others. It's very West Coast. Standing back a bit, always observing and critiquing, but never really engaging and loving in the messiness of life.

So if that's the reality and that's so many, that kind of describes all of us in one way or another, why have denominations? I mean, are they even biblical? Where do they come from?

Well, I think at best, denominations come out of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. So if you take your Bible and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 for just a moment.

[8 : 26] 1 Corinthians chapter 1. See, there is no such thing as the completely independent local church. Doesn't exist. Shouldn't exist.

In 1 Corinthians 1, in verse 2, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in Corinth. This is what he says. To the church of God that is in Corinth. The local church is the church of God.

To those sanctified, made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be holy together with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their God and ours.

You see, it's both. Paul wants to put before the Corinthians. Yes, they are the church of God, but they belong to and are not completely independent upon everyone else who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their God and ours.

So the same Holy Spirit who draws us into fellowship with each other also gives us a love and unity for other Christians and other congregations outside ours. Okay? But when you think about it, it's completely impossible for us to have friendship and to meet all the Christians there are in the world

or all the Christians in BC, let alone Vancouver, let alone the West Side.

[9 : 39] And denominations are a way to avoid the danger of being sectarian while expressing the fellowship of the Spirit wider than your local church. So if you wanted to find a denomination, a denomination is like an alliance or an association of local churches but not all churches together.

And you can even see the beginnings of denominations in the New Testament. There are churches in the New Testament, groups of churches that have natural associations with each other. You know, the churches that the Apostle Peter planted, he writes to.

The churches that the Apostle Paul planted, he writes to. And later on, the Apostle Paul goes to the churches that he's planted around Greece and he calls on them to give money, give a collection for the Christians who are starving back in Jerusalem.

There's no organizational structure, but I just point out there's nothing unbiblical about churches associating together. So groups of churches, what they've done throughout history is got together and they've created some structures so that it's easier for them to do things like publications and insurance and training ministers.

I mean, in the early church, after the Apostles died, Christianity would come to a place and there'd be one church and then there'd be a second church and then there'd be a third church. How do those churches relate to each other?

[11 : 05] So there was a gradual and complicated growth in the way of associating with each other until about 300, after 300 AD, when the Emperor Constantine took over in Rome and centralized the organization of the church.

But here is the, I'm saying that denominations are not unbiblical, but here is the problem. With organizational structures. What happens over time is that the structure, the institution, gradually becomes more important than the churches that it's created to serve.

And churches, the local churches in some organizations are seen to exist for the organization and not the other way around. Worse than that is when an organization falls into the hands of those who do not believe the gospel, then the very structure that was created out of the fellowship of the spirit and the unity of the spirit is used to oppose the gospel and oppose the fellowship of the spirit.

And when that happens, we have to stand with the gospel and not with the organization. So, that's the first point, Anglicanism. I'm not going to take questions during this lecture, but if you have questions after the service, I'll come over here with this, my one fan.

Secondly, just seeing who's awake. Secondly, historic Anglicanism and the 39 articles. We'll do a bit of history now. You ready for this? Good.

[12 : 42] The Anglican Church, as you know, you probably know, was born at a time of great upheaval, cultural, political, and religious change in Europe in the 1500s.

It's called the Reformation. Christianity came to England way back before 300 AD and it was not really until 600 AD that Rome exercised any influence over the churches in England.

But by the 1500s, the medieval Roman Catholic Church had become deeply corrupt in belief and behaviour. Not universally, of course, but it was wealthy and powerful and immoral and they had added lots, lots of ways to, lots of rites and ceremonies and sacraments under the authority of the Pope and they said, we own the means of salvation.

And in 1517, there was one monk called Martin Luther who nailed 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral protesting the corruption of the Roman Church and his first thesis was that all of life should be about repentance.

And it was like, it was a match to dry tinder and over the next century, the Reformation spread throughout all of Northern Europe and it brought with it a rediscovery of scripture, the voice of God in scripture and not just in the church exposing corruption, a particular emphasis on the free grace of God in salvation and justification by faith alone.

[14 : 22] And the Reformation made its way across the channel into England in a very messy way. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, but it did have to do with Henry VIII's marriage problems.

And the Reformation came wrapped politically, but it was not just political. It was fundamentally about the rediscovery of the gospel. And the principal architect of the Church of England, the English Church, the Anglican Church during this period was Archbishop Thomas Cramner, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury, who reformed the church and was largely responsible for the Book of Common Prayer in the 39 Articles and was later burned at the stake for what he had done.

There are three founding documents that he created which combine doctrine, devotion, and discipleship. And arguably, the most important are the 39 Articles.

And we're going to have a look at them. Would you like to do that? Yes, please. So this wine-coloured book in front of you, if you had opened a page, I think it's 699.

The 39 Articles are like a domestic creed for Anglicans.

[15:42] They're the closest thing you can get to true Anglican identity or the closest thing to the Anglican way of doing theology. They're a brilliant model for doing theology. And the first thing to notice is there's only 39 of them.

There aren't great volumes. There aren't great lists of what you must believe and mustn't believe. There's a great freedom to them.

That's because the Anglican way of doing theology loves comprehensiveness. It gives unity at the centre in order that we can get on with the job of following Jesus and bringing Jesus to others.

And as you read through the 39 Articles, which you're all going to do before you leave tonight, no we're not. But if you should read them in a moment in your life when you need to, you'll notice that they have a method.

They're absolutely clear on the positive things that the Bible teaches. Justification by faith, salvation by God's grace, etc. They're absolutely clear on what the Bible prohibits and bans.

[16:45] Not just heresies with long names, but things like purgatory or praying to saints or the infallibility of the church. But the biggest thing you get from them, I think, is how permissive they are.

They leave so much room for secondary issues. They're not meant to be a complete theology, but they are meant to ensure an apostolic and Catholic church.

Do you understand what I'm saying? So the Bible is not narrow and exclusive on many things. So we are not. And the 39 articles are broad and minimal, condensed, but not inflexible.

So let me give you an example. Let's look at what we believe about Scripture. Turn down to Article 6 on page 700. Of the sufficiency of Holy Scriptures for salvation.

I'm going to read the first sentence. Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or be thought requisite or necessary for salvation.

[18:00] Do you understand? If it's not in the Bible, you don't have to believe it. There's great freedom around that. Look down to Article 20. The last sentence in that article which begins, Wherefore?

Although the church be a witness and keeper of holy writ, it ought not to decree anything against the same. Sorry, I meant the second sentence.

And yet, it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written.

Neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. In other words, the church is not above the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are above the church. That is why when we gather here we have Bible readings and sermons out of the Bible. The Bible is like the way Jesus rules his church. The church didn't create the Scriptures.

The Scriptures created the church. And notice, please, Anglicans believe it is the word of God written. So this Bible, it's not just, it's not a witness to the revelation.

[19:15] You understand? It's not a record of the revelation. It is God's revelation now. The authority of God now comes to us through this written record.

It is God's word written. That's what other people call inspiration. The inspiration of the Bible doesn't mean it's inspiring like Shakespeare. It means that God breathed out every word on every page.

There's a myth. You might hear some people say, well, Anglicans, we use a three-legged stool to make decisions. Scripture, tradition, and reason, and sometimes experience as well.

But they are not three equal authorities. That is outrageously false. They're apples and oranges.

Scripture comes to us from God through humans. But reason and tradition are a human enterprise trying to understand Scripture.

What about the church? Look back at Article 19. The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men and women in the which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that are that of necessity are requisite to the same.

[20 : 40] I think that is absolutely fascinating. It's not a definition. It's a description. It's permissive. It's not restrictive. It allows all sorts of forms of church, right?

It has nothing to do with denomination. It has nothing to do with institution or organization. There's no mention of bishops because the Anglican view is the church is the local congregation of men and women who have faith in God.

And there are three marks of the true church. One is the pure word of God is preached. The true word of God without additions and subtractions. The sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance.

Obedience to Christ's word in the form of sacraments. In all things necessary, a requisite and necessary to the same which means there's some form of discipline. Okay?

So I wanted to do those 13, I just wanted to touch on those articles to give you some sense of the way we do theology. But I've got to say this, that it doesn't matter how good your documents or constitutions or how good your intentions are, that doesn't bring spiritual life and it doesn't guarantee the gospel to the next generation.

[21 : 53] So we come to our third point, mere Anglicanism. What is mere Anglicanism? You ask me. There are nine features and in saying this I'm borrowing very heavily on the work of Dr. Jim Packer and Bishop Paul Barnett and I'm going to mention them fairly quickly as I go but I'm going to have a couple of, what do you call them, road trips, day trips, excursions.

It's on the way. Is that alright? Good. So here are nine features of mere Anglicanism. Firstly, the final authority is holy scriptures in all things relating to salvation.

We've just looked at that, haven't we? But did you notice that the article on the Bible said the scriptures are sufficient? In other words, they are sufficient to make us wise to salvation.

They are the only true source of knowledge of God our Savior, the scriptures. There are no fresh truths to be uncovered. It also opens the way for us to read the Bible.

Sometime later, look at article 7. It talks about the Old Testament and says that eternal life comes to us through Jesus Christ both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. They both come from one God and God doesn't speak with a forked tongue.

[23 : 14] You can't expound one part of the Bible to disagree with another. Firstly, scripture. Secondly, mere Anglicanism is Protestant. That's a movement within Christianity that includes Baptists and Presbyterians and the Reformed Church and Lutherans and Methodists and Pentecostals and the Alliance and the Brethren and the Mennonites and the Salvos.

And in the original understanding, it wasn't just we were protesting against the additions had been added to the gospel. It was like confessing the faith openly. Thirdly, mere Anglicanism is Catholic and creedal.

Later, when you look at article number eight, you will realise we believe the creeds because they're biblical. The creeds secure the truths of the Bible. The three creeds that we affirm came about at times of high controversy in the life of the church.

And the central truths of the creeds are re-articulated in the articles. However, when I say we're Catholic, we are not Roman Catholic.

Okay? And I think there's so much, there seems to be a particular problem around this today. So I'm going to spend, this we're going to go on a little excursion. This is the first excursion. So if you're madly taking notes, that's where we're up to.

[24 : 37] tonight in the creed, you said, I believe in the Holy Catholic Church. What does that mean, the Catholic Church?

Some people say it means universal, as though we're talking about the church in Africa, Asia and Australia, but that's not it. The word Catholic means according to the whole, and I think it means primarily three things.

The first thing is this, it means that there is no such thing as one perfect church denomination on earth. Because all the things that belong to the church of Jesus Christ belong to every Christian, no matter what their denomination.

So when we say the creeds, we are committing ourselves to 2,000 years of tradition, and all of church history, all the way back to the person of Jesus Christ, belongs to all Christians.

So the great theologians of the past, Augustine and Athanasius and Aquinas and Anselm and Abelard, they belong to us. So when we say that the Bible is the final authority on all matters, it doesn't mean that we consult the Bible and no one else.

[25 : 54] Because it's really important for us to know what great Christians of the past have struggled with. It's just humility. Ben told me last night that Chesterton calls it giving democracy to the dead.

The reformers didn't want to invent a new church, they wanted to reform the existing church. And to Catholic means all of the true church belongs to all true Christians. Secondly, it means, Catholic means the church is for every creature under heaven.

It's not just for people like us. It's not just for one particular denominational group. But when you become a true Christian, you are bound to the church of Jesus Christ, which includes those who have died and are in heaven now, as well as those who confess Christ around the world.

And there is no one who can define the boundaries of the Catholic church. It's not our job anyway.

The Lord knows who is his. And thirdly, Catholic means genuine. It's the holy Catholic church.

And it's holy because it's Jesus church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. I'm not the head of the church. Pope's not the head of the church. Our church's genuist comes from Jesus.

[27 : 12] Here endeth the excursion. Let's get back to mere Anglicanism. Number four, mere Anglicanism is reformed.

That means it comes out of the Reformation and we have Reformation convictions. All the founding documents, the Book of Common Prayer, the Ordination Services and the 39 Articles, express the great insights of the Reformation.

So our life and our faith as Christian Anglicans is centered on God because we believe that it's God who works our salvation and all the glory goes to him.

We've been saved through the death of Jesus. These are the fundamental Reformation convictions.

You sometimes hear Anglicanism called the via media as they were halfway between Roman Catholicism and what we used to call hot prots, you know, hot Protestants, Puritans.

And I think while that may be politically true, it's theologically untrue. We're not a middly, muddly, mushy, average. We're reformed. Fifthly, mere Anglicanism is liturgical and sacramental.

[28 : 27] Let me speak about sacraments for just a moment. There is a clear understanding of the sacraments in the 39 articles. It's not the Roman Catholic understanding nor is it the Lutheran understanding or Calvin's understanding.

There are only two sacraments, not seven, the Lord's Supper and Baptism. Both of them have been given by Jesus. Both of them are signs of the gospel and they are effectual signs of grace.

It's not that grace comes to us automatically when we receive them, nor does grace attach to the objects of the sacrament. But take the Lord's Supper. As our faith is directed toward the true Jesus Christ whose body is in heaven, that is how we participate with him.

And if you want to see where that is, that is in article 28. Let me speak about infant baptism for just a moment because I know that's an issue for some of us.

Let's turn up infant baptism, shall we? Article 27. I want you to see how the prayer book speaks about infant baptism.

[29 : 52] Look at the last line of article 27. All the rest of it is about baptism. But then the last line says, the baptism of young children isn't any wise to be retained in the church as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.

Now do you notice how it's arguing? It's not saying you have to believe it. It's not forcing you to believe it. It's not saying there's some knockdown proof for infant baptism.

It's saying it's agreeable to the institution of Christ. And if you want to talk to me later about that, I'm happy to do so. Let's have an excursion then. Let's have another trip. Because I see some of you drifting badly.

Actually, drifting gently. I want to talk a little bit about liturgy. Why do we have written liturgy?

Wouldn't it be much better for us to be spontaneous and unrehearsed?

I mean, wouldn't it give more room for the Holy Spirit if we just turned up here on Sunday nights and Aaron winged it? He looks like he's winging it, but he's not. And I want to say, right off, there are dangers in following a written liturgy.

[31 : 05] It can become a sort of a rote repetition. You know, you can say things outwardly and your heart can be a thousand miles away. God says, and Jesus says about some, these people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

And if it's that kind of liturgy and if we're doing that, God hates that. We don't use liturgy because it's artistically or aesthetically pleasing. There are negative reasons and there are positive reasons.

The negative reasons are these. It's a form of protection to use written liturgy. Written liturgy protects the congregation from the weirdness of the minister and the leader. who knows whether the clergy at St. John's will suddenly become odd around something theological. The liturgy protects you from our oddness, our faddishness. It protects us from people in the congregation who want to dominate or who are one issue people. It protects us from being a me-centred church because every gathering we have is God centred because of the written liturgy.

[32 : 18] It protects us from the dictatorship of the now and having to be always on the cutting edge of relevance. Instead it soaks us in scripture. It immerses us in God's glory and week by week it reminds us of the priority of God's grace and of repentance.

And positively we use liturgy because it forms us week by week by the gospel. Did you know that in Anglican liturgies in every service prayer book?

There is an order, a structure, a movement which takes us through the gospel itself. We move through the gospel, we did it tonight, we came into praise, we confessed our sin, we heard the word of grace and then we confessed our faith in creed and prayers and hymns.

we know that. I knew a man years ago at St. John's whose wife had left him and he came to St. John's and I said, what's keeping you as a Christian?

He'd been at our church for six years. He said, I cannot remember a word of any sermon I've heard, though I assume they're all fine, he said. But every week I make myself come and we get to that point in the service where we say the creed and I'm confronted with the massive truths of the Christian faith.

[33 : 46] God created this world. Christ is sent to die for me. There is a hope in heaven. So what written liturgy does is protects us. Our gatherings are not just about songs and sermons.

We use our bodies, we kneel, we stand, we participate in confession. And that's because this is the long journey, this is the ongoing, long-term transformation.

How people change is in the routines and rhythms of our lives. And week by week we come and enter into the gospel. And it doesn't matter whether you are tragically sad or brilliantly happy, when you come every Sunday it ought to be comprehensible, gospel-focused, Christ-centered, up-building, transgenerational, participatory.

That's why we have written liturgies. Sixth, mere Anglicanism is missional and pastoral. The shape of our life and gatherings mean this, that the presentation of Christ, when we preach the gospel we don't do it in a high-pressure, one-off, salesman, manipulative way.

In the Anglican church we don't do hit-and-run evangelism separate from the normal routine and ongoing life of the church. It's a settled thing, week by week. I've met people who've become Christians in hymns, in prayers, in the liturgy.

[35 : 16] I visited churches across the country, Anglican churches, where they've had ministers who don't believe anything about the Bible, but through the liturgy week by week they've been fed and they've grown.

the great thing about the way we do things, being missional and pastoral, is that you don't have to believe before you belong, you can belong before you believe.

And it's structured that way because we believe that God's grace goes before us and that every single one of us, every single one of us is in the same need of God's kindness and mercy and forgiveness.

You don't have to get your act together to become an Anglican, it's the opposite. The Anglican church for you is for you if you're sinful. We're like a big AA meeting, every week we come and confess our sins.

You ever thought about how odd that is? I remember going to an AA meeting back in Shaughnessy and the guys stood up and defined themselves. Hi, my name's David and I'm an alcoholic and then they'd tell these terrible truths about what they'd done to their lives.

[36 : 19] That's what we do in the confession. We do it politely. And it's missional in the sense that since the 1700s Anglicanism has sponsored global mission, sending and funding missionaries.

Do you know my grandfather was a missionary in Africa? My father was born in Africa. My father was a missionary in Africa. I was born in Africa. My parents served there for 10 years. And in Africa and Asia, that's where the great growth is.

