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The ADC Disciple

Anabaptist Disciples of Christ is an affiliation of Conservative Anabaptist churches seeking likeminded fellowship, instruction, and accountability in church administration and congregational life in the Biblical pattern of the Apostolic church.

How the Gospel Seed Grows

A reflection on the core commitments of Anabaptism

by Steven Brubaker

When a group of people receive, embrace, and follow the good news of Jesus, a new way of life takes root and grows. The gospel seed matures in a tree with particular practices, values, stories, songs, and ways of doing everything. Anabaptism is a faith heritage that emerged from a gospel planting in the 1500s. While the values of Anabaptists can be found in other faith traditions, this set of emphases forms a distinctive testimony to the gospel of Jesus.

Devotion

A Bible study in Zurich, Switzerland in the 1520s triggered a series of events that resulted in the birth of the Anabaptist movement. Ulrich Zwingli, a pastor in the state church, gathered a number of capable men to seek biblical direction for the church. Through that Bible study, Zwingli and other members of the group, including Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and George Blaurock, concluded that infant baptism was not a scriptural practice. They disagreed, however, on what should be their response. Zwingli wanted to turn the matter over for the government to decide, while his students insisted obedience to the Bible was the only option. The government met and ordered anyone who refused to have their children baptized to leave Zurich.

The next part of the story is beautifully told in the Hutterian Chronicle:

One day when they were meeting, fear came over them and struck their hearts. They fell on their knees before the almighty God in heaven and called upon him who knows all hearts. They prayed that God grant it to them to do his divine will and that he might have mercy on them. Neither flesh and blood nor human wisdom compelled them. They were well aware of what they would have to suffer for this. After the prayer, George Blaurock stood up and asked Conrad Grebel in the name of God to baptize him with true Christian baptism on his faith and recognition of the truth. With this request he knelt down, and Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no appointed servant of the Word. Then the others in their turn asked George to baptize them, which he did. And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord. They confirmed one another for the service of the Gospel and began to teach the faith and to keep it. This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways.

Baptism as an adult represents the early Anabaptist understanding of who is a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is one who has made a personal decision to follow Jesus: "I

must make this decision, not my parents, not my church leaders, not my government." The decision for baptism must be voluntary, not forced or manipulated. It must be passionate and heartfelt. It is also an adult decision; it is made with an understanding of its implications.

"This was the beginning of separation from the world and its evil ways."

It is not enough to be born to people who have made that commitment, not enough to go to church with people who have made that commitment, and not enough to be a citizen of a nation that calls itself Christian. It is not enough to merely accept Christ. A follower of Jesus is a person who has made a personal, passionate, and voluntary commitment to Christ and His church. Anabaptists emphasize devotion.

Brotherhood

An organism is the smallest unit of sustainable physical life. Individual cells, tissues, and even organs ordinarily do not survive when cut off from the life of the entire organism.

What is the smallest unit of sustainable life in the kingdom of God? Is it the church or the individual believer? According to James Sire, "Whether Catholic, evangelical, mainline, liberal or conservative, Christians see themselves as individuals first and communities second."

The Anabaptist answer to this question has been different. Anabaptism understands that the focus of God's work on the earth is the body of Christ: the church. Instead of the church existing for the individual, the individual exists to be a part of the church. During the climatic last months of Jesus' life on earth, He reveals himself as Christ, as Messiah, and as King. When Peter acknowledges this, Jesus blesses him and then says: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." For 2,000 years, Jesus has been keeping His promise to build His church. The church is at the center of God's redemptive work. If you want to know what God is up to in the world, don't look to the places of political power or to the places of economic power or to the places in the news. Look at the local church.

The good news of Jesus Christ is not about me. Or you. The grand story of God at work in the world does not revolve around you or me. It revolves around Christ and the body of Christ, the church. As we participate in His church, we enter and become part of that larger story—God's story. Anabaptists emphasize brotherhood.

Separation

An early Anabaptist German phrase, nachfolge Christi, points to a third emphasis: following Christ. Anabaptism is Christ-centered. It describes the gospel in terms of following Him. It reads the Bible through the lens of the teachings and life of Christ. It understands the goal of life: to love Christ and become like him.

But many Christian groups use the term "Christ-centered." How does the Anabaptist understanding of Christ-centered differ from the norm?

In writing to the Colossians, Paul uses the language of being Christ-centered when he says "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." He quickly adds additional words,

- "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you
- Put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience
- And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Paul expects a focus on Christ to result in a radically different kind of life. Saying yes to Jesus means saying no to all other lords. Christ's followers will love Jesus and be out of sync with the dominant culture. This is not isolation from the world but rather a life of obedience to Christ in full view of the world.

The word we sometimes use to capture both Christ-centered and counter-cultural is separation—separation to Jesus and separation from evil. Anabaptists emphasize separation.

Sacrificial Love

The means available for people to get in the way of evil range from violent approaches (law enforcement, warfare, assassinations) to sacrificial methods (serving, counseling, dying for another). The difference between violence and sacrifice is the difference between forcing others to do good and inviting them to do good. It is the difference between having to and wanting to. It is the difference between a person refusing an abortion because its illegal or because they want the child. It is the difference between causing pain or bearing pain. How does Jesus want his followers to engage evil?

Many Christian groups today embrace the entire spectrum of responding to evil as appropriate for Christ followers, at least at certain times. From its birth in Zurich and its heavy-handed government, Anabaptism has insisted that Jesus authorized only sacrificial methods of fighting evil. Anabaptists emphasize sacrificial love.

Sacrificial love has two components. The first component has to do with what God is doing in us, His followers. The power of God is made available through Jesus to remake His followers into lovers—lovers of God, the people of God, family, neighbors, and even enemies (Matthew 22:35-39). Sacrificial love is not merely something we do. It is something we are becoming. God intends to change us into people whose natural response to enemies is seeking their best interests.

"Sacrificial love is not merely something we do. It is something we are becoming."

The second component of sacrificial love has to do with how God wants to address evil through us. As people who are becoming lovers of enemies, it follows that only those means consistent with love are available to us. As Paul wrote to the Roman church, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Christ's followers get in the way of evil through redemptively prophetic presence and sacrificial love. This is not self-protection or passivity. This is how we fight against the evil and injustice in the world.

Living

Christianity includes teachings that are to be believed and lived. Which should receive more emphasis: believing the teachings or living them? Clearly, both are important. This is not a question of which one to accept and which one to reject. Instead, it is a question of which one is more basic or more fundamental. One minister said it this way: "You can get your thinking straight or your living right but not both. The Gospel is about getting your thinking straight." The Anabaptist answer is different. Anabaptists emphasize living.

By living, we don't mean mere behavior. Living is a whole-person word that includes loving, being, and doing. Anabaptists are more impressed with the person who lives the gospel and cannot talk eloquently about it than the person with a powerful testimony and unconvincing life. This emphasis on sustained, daily, ordinary obedience flows from passages throughout the New Testament that combine believing and living. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Mat 7:24-27). In the words of the early Anabaptist Hans Denck, "For whoever thinks he belongs to Christ must walk the way that Christ walked."

In conclusion

The acronym BLeSSeD is a way to remember these five Anabaptist emphases. Blessed, a central word in the Sermon on the Mount, brings to mind the pivotal role the Sermon has played in the thought and life of Anabaptists over the years.

Brotherhood: Followers of Christ find identity, belonging, and purpose in the church

Living: Followers of Christ live each day in trusting obedience

Separation: Followers of Christ separate from the evil practices of the age

Sacrificial Love: Followers of Christ are becoming lovers of others, even their enemies

Devotion: Followers of Christ are lovingly devoted to God: heart, soul, mind, strength

The Christian community, a godly heritage, is a primary way that God provides the resources for living out the good news of Jesus Christ. It is in the church community, a living tradition, that God has chose to give as an essential resource that helps us to grow up in Him. Local churches, anchored in 2000 years of faithful doctrine and practice, receiving with gratitude the wisdom that they have been handed, and building anew on the grace of the past, are in position to help fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God.

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Steve Brubaker is the Administrator of Faith Builders Educational Programs, Inc., Guys Mills, PA. Steve and his wife Cynthia have five children – Kyle, married to Brooke; Desiree, married to John Mark Kuhns; Antoine, married to Jalina; Travis, married to Meghan; and Courtney, married to Ben Bergey.

PASTOR SPOTLIGHT

James and Gladys Yoder serve at Berea Christian Fellowship, Nappanee, Indiana. They have six children – Austin, married to Melinda; Bronson, married to Charity; Candace; Deidri, married to Keldon Kennell; Elyse, married to Josh Nolt; and Fydel. They have eleven grandchildren and are anticipating their twelfth.

James was commissioned as a missionary in 1991 and served with Believer's Fellowship in Ontario from 1991-2005. He was also ordained as a Pastor in 1997 for both Believer's Fellowship and BCF and ordained as Lead Pastor at BCF in 2009.

James works in sales and design at AYR Custom Cabinetry.

James also serves as Secretary on the Faith Builders board and as a pastoral representative on the board of United Christian School. He also serves on a sub-committee that is revisiting the mission/vision/values of UCF. James also served as Vice-Chairman on the inaugural ADC Planning Committee and as Chairman from February 2020- January 2022.

James recommends the following podcasts - *The Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* podcast by Pete Scazzero (weekly); *BER* – Biblical Eldership Resource podcast or topic (weekly); and *Minute With Maxwell* (daily). He also is an avid reader as evidenced by his recommendations –

- *"With"* by Skye Jethani (One of James' top five reads)
- *"A Tale of Three Kings"* by Gene Edwards (A great mentoring book to give a new/young Pastor)
- *"Historical Drift – Must my Church die?"* by Arnold Cook (Very compelling)
- *"On Being a Pastor"* by Derek Prime/Alistair Begg (A must read for all Pastors)
- *"An Unhurried Life"* by Alan Fadling (For the harried Pastor)
- *"Leading on Empty"* by Wayne Cordeiro (A book underlined and highlighted from cover to cover. Recommended to read before you hit an emotional/fatigue crisis.)

James reflects on his pastoral journey – "It's difficult to pack 32 years of ministry into a few words. We reflect on our time on the mission field as God's personal training school to better prepare us for ministry today. In retrospect, we were far too wet behind the ears to tackle such an undertaking, yet the call came abundantly clear. Working cross-culturally created plenty of opportunity to eat our share of humble pie, yet also expanded our worldview in compelling ways. Our experience in missions forced us to do deep introspection in our own hearts, resulting in asking many questions about culture, tradition, convictions, beliefs, and practices, yet ultimately anchoring ourselves deeply in the Word and in prayer. Those were defining years for us. What birthed from that time of heavy lifting was a passion to model after the Rabbi, Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of our souls.

It goes without saying that the transition from the mission field to Pastoring in a large Anabaptist community was rather brutal. The 'return' was much more difficult than the original 'leaving,' yet even in that experience, God gave ample opportunity for refinement. The call to serve as Lead Pastor in the church of my childhood came rather unanticipated, yet in many ways it rang true to the Pastoral call that wakened early in my youth. We embraced the mantle gifted to us. The journey has been exhilarating, difficult, joy-filled, fatiguing, deeply satisfying, fraught with sleepless nights, awed at God's goodness, and yes, even times that we were ready to throw in the towel. Yet every time the dust settled, and the Pastor sat quietly with the Rabbi, my faith and confidence anchored yet more deeply in His rock-solid faithfulness. I know He brought me here and I know He's going to complete the good work which He started.

One of the deep joys of Pastoring has been working alongside the team of fellow Pastors and Deacons God has rallied around me. Their lives have developed me in profound ways. And lest you think we function glitch-free, let me assure you that we need to work very hard to keep unity among us. Several things we've learned that grows healthy teams is honesty, speaking words of blessing to each other (both publicly and privately), and choosing to trust. It is also important to care enough to have the tough conversations, yet be kind, gentle, and patient with each other, which is evidenced by the Spirit's fruit. Another valuable team-building action is to choose to appreciate the other person's gift, even though it differs greatly from your own.

I've passed the peak of Pastoral ministry and the baton is being handed off to a younger generation. I'm excited because Jesus Christ, the Head Shepherd of the church, is at the helm. We ought never think that any success, goodness, or growth is the result of our doings. God forbid. My life theme is I Corinthians 2:2 - *"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."* Glad and I are humbled that we have been called to serve as under-Shepherds in the greatest ecclesiastical movement ever in history, under the direction of King Jesus! To him be glory!"

A sincere thank you to James and Glad for your service to the Church of Christ!

ADC Church Profile —

Way of Jesus Fellowship was founded November 2009. The church is located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and has approximately sixty attendees as formal membership is not required at this point.

The church was begun by individuals who were involved in a ministry in Lancaster City in the mid-1990's. Out of that and with a clear call from God, the group started having Sunday morning services.

The current leadership team consists of Dale Smucker, Pastor; Seth Crouse and Mark Zook, Elders.

The church is involved in ministries such as the Lancaster Bible School; Camp Andrews boys and girls camps; children's church held on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and the Way of Jesus Academy School.

The original group held church in a ten by ten living room, moved a number of times, and is currently holding services in a building they own.

"The preacher's sharpest and strongest preaching should be to himself. His most difficult and laborious work must be with himself."

- E. M. Bounds

"People are very concerned about the End Times at our church, and especially how the preacher goes past the one for his sermon and makes them late to lunch."

"A true preacher is a man sent from another world into this world with a message from another world for lost people in this world who will soon be going to the next world."

- Leonard Ravenhill

"A pastor must have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the skin of a rhinoceros."

- Charles Spurgeon

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