



THE RESTORATION PROJECT: The Basics

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM, Fireside Room

The Basics of Christianity

Part One: *The Way of Jesus, Baptism, and Eucharist*

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.* (BCP, p. 308)

Christianity – The Way of Love

Christian life finds its beginnings in, and centers on, the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we have come to know as Jesus the Christ. To be a Christian is to have faith in Jesus. But, while the modern definition of 'faith' has reduced it to mean simply "belief", as theologian Marcus Borg points out, premodern understandings of "faith" were much less about the head as they were about the heart. Christianity has long been as much, if not more, about the work and way of faith (that is, the work and the way of the heart) as it has been about propositional beliefs.

"At the center of Jesus' own teaching is the notion of a 'way' or a 'path,' and the first name of the early Christian movement was 'the Way'... Christian faith means affirming the utter centrality of Jesus. It means seeing Jesus as the decisive disclosure of God and of what a life full of God looks like. It means affirming Jesus as the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the light of the world, the way, and more, all known in a person." (Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*).

"The premodern meanings of 'faith' generate a relational understanding of the Christian life. I return to the words Jesus as he spoke about the greatest commandment, and as I do so, I substitute the word 'relationship.'...At the center of the Christian life are two relationships that are ultimately one. The first relationship is 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, life force, mind, and strength.' The second relationship, 'like it,' is 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'...Jesus declares that the... Christian life is as simple and challenging as this: to love God and to love that which God loves." (Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*).

Beginning the Way: Baptism and the Body of Christ

If the Christian life is a particular “way”, then we must attend first to how one might enter into and begin that way. The following excerpts from Rowan Williams’s small but pithy book *Being Christian* describe the earliest understandings of baptism as entry into the Way of Jesus, and indeed as a drawing of people into the very life of Jesus. Williams describes ancient depictions of Jesus’ own baptism as having him immersed up to his neck in water with the likenesses of lesser god’s, river deities and their like, beneath his feet, while above him, the dove, the Holy Spirit and the breath of God, descends from heaven. Williams explains that for early Christians, and hopefully for us, the baptism of Jesus places him deep in the waters of death and chaos (those other gods), surrounded by darkness, while simultaneously breathing in the Spirit who first blew over the waters of chaos in creation. The two “neighborhoods” of suffering and of the divine life, are the neighborhoods that Jesus is drawn into through his baptism.

“...the beginning of Christian life is a new beginning of God’s creative work...a kind of restoration of what it is to be truly human. To be baptized is to recover the humanity that God first intended.” (Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*)

“The baptized person is... in the middle of two things that seem quite contradictory: in the middle of the heart of God, the ecstatic joy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and in the middle of a world of threat, suffering, sin and pain. And because Jesus has taken his stand right in the middle of those two realities, that is where we take ours.” (Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*)

“Baptism brings you into the neighbourhood of other Christians...to be with Jesus is to be where human suffering and pain are found, and it is also to be with other human beings who are invited to be with Jesus. We are ‘implicated’ in one another, our lives are interwoven.” (Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*)

Nourished for the journey: Eucharist and practices for deepening spiritual life

We are called on our way in the midst of others who, like us, have been invited to be with Jesus – we are, as Christians, never on our way alone. We travel with others and practice the Way in community. The life of community, combined with our call to join Christ in the depths of human suffering while staying attuned to the joy of God with us, require regular spiritual habits and nourishment to sustain us on our way. For a long time the Christian path, in almost all its various iterations, powerfully begun in baptism, and rekindled at confirmation, has included regular prayer in community, and the practice of Eucharist. In Eucharist we are reminded of our story and our heritage as members of a way traveled by many before us. In Eucharist, we see the abundance of God described in the life of Jesus and in God resurrecting him from the grave. In Eucharist, because of these things, we literally “give thanks” for our lives in light of grace – in fact Eucharist literally means “thanksgiving”. In the solemn regular act of receiving Christ’s body and blood, we are reminded and nourished again with the knowledge that God loves us, joins us, and empowers us to serve his good and beautiful world clouded by chaos though it may be.

“For Christians, to share in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, means to live as people who know that they are always guests- that they have been welcomed and that they are wanted. It is, perhaps, the most simple thing that we can say about Holy Communion, yet it is still supremely worth saying. In Holy Communion, Jesus tells us that he wants our company... This giving and receiving of welcome is central to the way in which Jesus’ ministry is portrayed in the Gospels. But it is not just an agreeable personal habit that Jesus has, and it is not a decorative addition to the main business of his ministry, a sort of pleasant extra. It is the actual, visible way in which he engages in remaking a community... Being in the neighborhood of Jesus is sharing Jesus’ freedom to invite – to make our lives and our communities places of welcome for those most deeply in need of solidarity, of fellowship.” (Rowan Williams, Being Christian)

“By identifying himself with the broken bread and the spilled wine, the broken flesh and the shed blood, Jesus says that this death which is approaching is a door into hope. And it is at that moment, when he is looking forward most clearly and vividly to his death...that Jesus gives thanks. That is, he connects his experience with the reality of God, because that is what thanksgiving does. When we say thank you to God we connect our own experience with God as Giver. We say that what has happened to us is somehow rooted in the gift of God. And when Jesus gives thanks at that moment before the breaking and spilling, before the wounds and the blood, it is as if he is connecting the darkest places of human experience with God the Giver; as if he is saying that even in these dark places God continues to give, and therefore we must continue to give thanks... So as we give thanks over bread and wine in the presence of the Lord we are – with him and in him – seeking to make that connection between the world and God, between human experience and the divine and eternal Giver.” (Rowan Williams, Being Christian)

The Heart of Christianity, Marcus Borg

Being Christian, Rowan Williams

Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

Mere Churchianity: Finding Your Way Back to Jesus-Shaped Spirituality, Michael Spencer

Unabashedly Episcopalian, Andrew Doyle

Unapologetic: Why despite everything Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense, Francis Spufford