

Firing on Four Cylinders

January 25, 2015

Genesis 17:1-19, Acts 2:37-41, Matthew 3:13-17

As Ambassadors for Christ, are we firing on four cylinders?

Baptism can be a source of conflict and division. It should be for celebration and joy. Are we true Baptists? In other words, are we living out all that our Baptism means?

Peter preached a great sermon. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said, 'what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37,38).

What shall we do?

Peter gives us the four cylinders of initiation into Christ. Mixing metaphors, four pillars, four legs of a chair. When we are born physically, if something is not working properly, e.g. oxygen blocked, it can effect the health of the baby. The same is true in our spiritual birth. There are four parts needed for a healthy Christian birth, when one or two are missing, we limp and wobble along.

1. Repent

Jesus said, repent and follow me. we know that means turn around. I can't go into depth today, simply to say repentance involves recognition, confession, renewal of mind, and change of behaviour and direction.

2. Believe in Jesus

This is implied not stated here. "To those who believed and received Him, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). If you believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved" (Romans) Belief means commitment and trust.

3. Baptism in water

What does baptism mean? Literally it means, Immerse into, initiate into.

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3).

Jesus death on the cross and resurrection was an historical event. We identify with him in baptism as we are baptised into his death, are buried and resurrected to new life.

4. Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Receive, be immersed in the Holy Spirit. So NB, returning to at later date.

When are we baptised?

Different Views: Infant / Believers, it all depends on the order.

Sacramental

What is a sacrament? An outward sign of an inward grace or reality.

3 infant baptism, followed by 1,2,4 at Confirmation.

Danger: outward sign without inward reality.

Evangelical

Infant: 3 baptism followed by 1,2,4 on conversion

Believers: 1,2,4 on conversion followed by 3

Pentecostal

Classic P, 1,2 on conversion, followed by 3 baptism in water, and 4 baptism in the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues.

Personal

I am less interested in the order, than making sure that everyone is firing on four cylinders. I start where people are and seek to move them closer to the Lord. When converted, many would like to seal their commitment through baptism and the symbolism of full immersion. If baptised as infants, we offer a reaffirmation of baptism with immersion. Holy Communion is for those who are baptised.

Why Children?

To answer we have to understand covenant.

If a multimillionaire were to invite you to be partners in their business and give you free access to all they own, would you be interested? It would probably be wise to get them to sign a contract right there and then to ensure you weren't dreaming.

Well God has made us a pretty generous offer which is not too dissimilar to this. It is all summed up in this word — Covenant.

What is a covenant?

At its most basic, it is an agreement, a promise or contract.

Two Greek words: *suntheke* = agreement on equal terms, *diatheke* = terms offered by one party which the other can accept or reject e.g. the terms set out for surrender by the victor in war.

Literally, the word means to cut by the shedding of blood. e.g. when we raise our hand in court, at one time it meant cutting one's wrist and letting the blood flow down as a promise to tell the truth. Shaking hands, at one time meant cutting one's hand and letting the blood mingle to establish an agreement. Why blood?

Life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). And then the will only comes into effect when someone dies, and the same is true with a covenant (Read Hebrews 9:16,17,20,22b). Under the Old Covenant or Testament or Will, it required the blood of animals, such as the lamb at Passover. Under the New Covenant or Testament or Will, it is Jesus blood which was shed. This one sacrifice now fulfills the OC requirements. "This is my blood of the New Covenant..." The word used for God's covenant is *diatheke*. He invites, sets the terms, offers the benefits and promises, and expects us to respond.

Look at characteristics of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 17.

Given by Grace

God chose Abram by grace, not because he had earned or deserved it. "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'I am..I will..you will'" (v. 1)

It is the same principle in the receiving of our salvation. God gives all by grace. "For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Outward Sign

"You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be a sign of the covenant between you and me" (v. 11).

The equivalent New Covenant sign is of course what? Baptism. The visible outward sign is water

Inward Reality

A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward reality/grace. Circumcision was the outward sign of the Old Covenant, signified a special relationship: "you are my people and I will your God and this will be a special relationship between me and you, and your descendants and for the generations to come (v.7).

Colossians describes a correlation of the inward meaning of the two outward signs. "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision in the putting off of sinful nature, not performed by human hands, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism,

and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11).

Children are included in a covenant relationship through the faith and cover of their parents. Under the OC they were also given the sign, so why should they be excluded under the NC.

cf. Catechism 105, 106.

It is a seal/ a sign of belonging. It says that my dues have been paid and I can now enter and participate in God’s business.

Promise

“I will make you...(v. 6), “I will give you...(v. 8) I will bless...(v. 16)

Abraham is promised a new home and country and that his descendants would become a great nation. Abram is renamed Abraham, which means the father of a great nation, signifying the fulfillment of this promise.

The bible is full of promises that God gives his covenant children.

Remember that a will describes the inheritance left to heirs of a person who has died. In Christ, we are heirs of Abraham. "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Galatians 3:14.) (Read verses 6,14-18, and 29)

Through Christ’s death, as God’s children we are named heirs of His kingdom estate. "The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16,17). It sounds too good to be true. So what is the catch?

"I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless, and I will confirm my covenant between me and you..."(17:1). “Then God said to Abraham, As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, for generations to come” (v.9). So fulfillment of God’s promise does require us to "keep the covenant." How?

Received by Faith

Back to that pivotal verse, "For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**" (Ephesians 2:8,9). God gives all by grace, and we receive by faith. Abraham is an encouragement to us. In spite of flawed faith - he fell facedown and laughed. Yet, he is remembered in the faith hall of fame. "**By faith** Abraham, even though he was past age — and Sarah herself was barren — was enabled to become a father because he considered him

faithful, who had made the promise” (Hebrews 11:11). The key? Abraham trusted that God would fulfill His promise, even though it didn’t make sense as they were past childbearing age.

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed** and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8).

How do we confirm our faith? Well...by confirmation. The way many churches, including us Anglican, confirm our initiation and commitment, is through “Confirmation.”

What is Confirmation? Four ingredients:

Renewal of commitment

Commitment to Christ. Fourfold initiation through repentance, acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord, baptism in water, and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Received into the Church

Commitment to regular Worship. In the early church this was every day. I recommend at least every week (Acts 2:42f).

Commitment to COOL as your local church through prayer, support of the leadership, and financial giving.

Empowering in the Holy Spirit

We’ll be returning to this for a series after Easter. For today, here is a beautiful prayer in the Confirmation service. “Almighty and everliving God, confirm and strengthen these your servants, we beseech you O Lord, with the Holy Spirit the Comforter; and daily increase in them your manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and fill them O Lord, with the spirit of your holy fear...that they may continue yours forever and ever; and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more.”

Commitment to Ministry

Commitment to receiving ministry, for example through training, home/growth groups

Commitment to discovering gifts and exercising a ministry.

Summary: God loved us so much that he gave us a deal, which is signed in his blood to show his good faith, to enter into partnership with him and have access to all his estate. In return he expects us to keep or be committed to this covenant.

NB. If anyone would like to be baptised or confirmed, or welcomed into COOL, please contact me.

Closing Prayer

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16,17).