

HOW THE GOSPEL SEED GROWS A REFLECTION ON THE CORE COMMITMENTS OF ANABAPTISM

Anabaptist Christians, as part of the Christian faith, have some things in common with other Christians. In this article, Steven Brubaker explores five distinctive contributions of Anabaptism to the faith. In addition to being the administrator of Faith Builders, Steven teaches several classes at the Institute, including Reading the Bible, Anabaptism as a Worldview, and Principles of Science.

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.

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.

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.



Steven Brubaker

REFLECTIONS & GRATITUDE

We are deeply grateful for the privilege of holding in-person instruction the entire 2020-21 academic year. Students and staff lived with exceptional flexibility as we navigated many adjustments to our normal routines.

We experienced God's faithfulness in all the challenges of the pandemic. We pray that His strength and grace remain as the lasting memories of this difficult year.

The FB student experience is a world (sometimes a whirlwind!) of activity and life together. Students prepared for and taught Sunday school, delivered lessons at FBSCS, and together engaged in the common chores of keeping house. All of this is held together by discipleship, rigorous courses, and a vision for all to be done to the glory of Christ.



KITCHEN SUPERVISOR NEEDED SEPTEMBER 2021

We are seeking applications for a kitchen supervisor, a full-time paid position. The kitchen supervisor manages food services for students, staff, and guests, and supervises the kitchen volunteers.

For information about this job description or to request an application, contact Sheldon Kauffman:
sheldonk@fbep.org
(814) 789-4518, ext. 242

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matthewm@fbep.org
(814) 789-4518, ext. 240

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Summer Term is filled to capacity with a waiting list. We look forward to spending five weeks in study and fellowship with more than 60 teachers.



For a full list of course descriptions and schedule:
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Teaching Diverse Learners	Becky Bollinger
Foundations of Education	Steven Brubaker
Principles of Teaching I	Patrick Heatwole
Science for the Non-Scientist	John Mark Kuhns
Teaching Secondary Math	John Mark Kuhns
Course Development Practicum	Gerald Miller
Mathematics for Elementary Teachers	Lynell Nissley
The Exceptional Learner	Lynell Nissley
Child Development	Jonas Sauder
Poetry Appreciation	Jonas Sauder
The Life of the Teacher	Jonas Sauder
Choir	Lyle Stutzman
Music Fundamentals	Lyle Stutzman
Teacher Secondary Music	Lyle Stutzman
Children's Literature	Anna Zehr
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UPCOMING EVENTS & TERMS

SUMMER TERM | JUNE 28 - JULY 30
Full to capacity with a waiting list.

COLLEGE STUDENT WEEKEND | JULY 9-11
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TEACHERS WEEK | AUGUST 3-6
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We have space for three lady students in the Teacher Apprenticing Program. We will consider late applications for those spaces. Apply at fbep.org/academics/semester.

TEACHERS CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 8-10
Check our website in mid-July for information about the program and the opening registration date: fbep.org/tc.

WINTER TERM | JAN. 3-FEB. 4, 2022
Registration opens early August.

REACH 2022 | MARCH 23-25, 2022
Registration opens this fall.

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CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2021!

We pray that you will continue to love God supremely and your neighbors as yourselves!



Left to right: Mary Beth Reihl, Bethany Beiler, Bethany Edmonson, Conrad Miller, Kerra Martin, Simon Stoltzfus, Luke Hochstetler, Cara Beiler, Melanie Yoder, Karen Hershberger, Hannah Waldner, Brendan Miller, Caleb Mast, Ryan Brubacher, Bethanie Lichty, Richard Stoltzfoos, Laura Burkholder, Travis Shetler, Rhonda Zimmerman, Tim Kurtz, Lexi Miller, Drew Roth

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