

## Introducing Theology 101...

Many of you who are newer to our congregation and many of you who are exploring church and spirituality in various ways have been asking me different questions about Christianity, what it is we believe and why we believe it. And so, I've decided to begin a series which I'll entitle "Theology 101". As every other Friday eblast I provide a meditation based on a passage from the biblical book of Proverbs, alternate Fridays I'll aim to provide a brief reflection on a particular topic or "doctrine" of the Christian faith.

Obviously, there are many ways into the Christian Faith. My primary way in is as a Presbyterian. Presbyterians have their roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation that took place in Europe. Reformed Protestants were called "Presbyterians" in Scotland and the word comes from the New Testament Greek word: *Presbyteros*, meaning: elder. Following the New Testament model we are a church governed by elders chosen by the people.

The other thing about us Presbyterians is that we do not believe our faith is a static, fixed thing. It changes and evolves as the Holy Spirit keeps moving us forward. As people come into the church with various backgrounds, experiences and cultures, and as each generation seeks to understand and express what they believe in new language, our faith is: "Reformed and ever reforming." And that's certainly the case for me. I am not in the same place I was 34 years ago in my mid 20s when I started ministry.

And yet, there are also core foundations of the faith that continue to be rock solid for us and for me. How they are expressed and understood may evolve and change, but the core remains the same. So what is this core?

There are a number of ways Christian faith can be broken down into various groupings of core topics. Here are the basic groupings:

- 1) Epistemology (from the Greek: *Episteme* – knowledge). How do we come to know about God? How do we come to faith? How do we know truth when it comes to the spiritual?
- 2) Theology (from the Greek: *Theos* – God). What do we believe about God?
- 3) Christology (from the Greek: *Christos* – Christ). What do we believe about Jesus? Why do we call him the Christ?
- 4) Pneumatology (from the Greek: *Pneuma* – Spirit). What do we believe about the Holy Spirit? How does the Spirit work and what does it do? And how is the Spirit, Christ and God all related?

5) Anthropology (from the Greek: *Anthropos* – Humanity). What do we believe about human origins, nature and destiny?

6) Cosmology (from the Greek: *Cosmos* – World). What do we believe about creation? How is it related to God and humanity?

7) Ecclesiology (from the Greek: *Ecclesia* – Church). What do we believe about the church? And here there is quite a bit of diversity among the various branches of Christianity.

8) Eschatology (from the Greek: *Eschatos* – Death). What do we believe happens after we die? But also what do we believe about the future? What may we hope for? And here, there is quite a bit of diversity between fundamentalist, evangelical, Protestant and Roman Catholic.

There are a number of topics within each of these groupings. Obviously I will have to be selective and brief as each of these can be the basis of volumes. But as a teaching elder (what ministers are in the Presbyterian Church), it may be helpful to provide some learning for you that may also stimulate your own reflection about what it is you believe. God speaks to us all in various ways and truth is no one person's domain.

These topical reflections are also meant to stimulate conversation, because we Presbyterians believe truth comes from communal interaction rather than through individual authorities with special access to God. I may have a lot more knowledge than many of you, but I am no closer to God than any of you, and God does not speak to me any more than God may be speaking to you. If I don't listen as much as I share, I will miss what God has to speak to me through you as much as you may learn something from me.

This also means any feedback is highly welcome.

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