

# LIVING FAITH

## 7.2: MINISTRY

7.2.1 – The ministry of the church is the ministry of Jesus Christ. As Christians our ministry is true ministry only as a participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. To minister is to serve. We all have 'gifts' with which to serve in the ministry of Christ.

7.2.2 – There are also particular gifts and 'special tasks' that are required for a church to function as a church. These tasks serve the building up of the church as a church.

7.2.3 – Ministers are 'set apart' to do three things in particular: Preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral care. Ministry is a conscious continuity of a task begun with the first disciples of Jesus who became called apostles. Both men and women are called to serve in this task of ministry. Is anything being left out here in terms of core tasks?

7.2.4 – The 'office of ruling elder' is a distinctive 'office' recognized in Presbyterian churches. Other churches organize themselves differently. Elders are chosen by the people, all genders, and they share in the leadership of the church equally with ministers. There is no hierarchy in Presbyterian churches, only different 'offices' (or tasks). The minister is a teaching elder. Other elders are called ruling elders because they govern the congregation.

7.2.5 – There are other ministries in the church, and once again, these are different tasks with no hierarchy attached. And once again, men and women are called equally to such tasks.

7.2.6 – The work of Christ is a collective enterprise.

One note: today, we are sensitive to recognizing that language that is binary "men and women" excludes those who identify as non-binary. Living Faith was written at a time when inclusion of women was the big step, but not yet inclusion of those with a different understanding of their gender than either-or.

## 7.3: WORSHIP

7.3.1 – The church lives to praise God. What does it mean to 'praise'? Is this privileging one mode of acknowledging God and connecting with God over others as part of worship?

7.3.2 – the various parts of worship are listed here. The last line is interesting. Do you feel you have been brought 'from darkness to light'? How? In what way? Has it happened already or is it a journey? And, if our experience of life right now includes darkness, are we excluded from worship?

7.3.3 – Have you ever thought of worship as 'the work of Christ'? The Greek word for worship is '*leitourgia*' or liturgy, meaning work (as service). This work is described in this statement primarily as 'intercession'. But what about worship as also equipping us with the inspiration and renewal to go out into the world through our week to serve?

#### 7.4: PREACHING

7.4.1,2 – Preaching is human words, and yet God's word can be heard through preaching. How? 'The Holy Spirit enables God's Word to be heard in the word of preaching.' Faith is renewed through the hearing and listening that takes place with preaching. We need the Holy Spirit otherwise preaching is just words.

Preaching is also dialogue (not included in Living Faith). The content, language, concerns and connections made in a sermon should be related to the ongoing conversation and pastoral relationship of the preacher with the people.

Preaching is a very central part of Presbyterian style worship. Preaching has to be based on the bible somehow, not simply topical, and it has to treat the bible seriously and as a whole rather than picking out verses to build up the preacher's own point of view. The congregation should hear the preacher's wrestling with the scriptures in order to trust the word that will come forth as authentic. The congregation should hear how the preacher bears witness in words to the living Word who is Christ speaking in and through the scriptures. What do you think?

#### 7.5: SACRAMENTS

7.5.1 – We have two sacraments as Protestants: Baptism and Holy Communion, because these two were instituted by Christ/apostles in the New Testament. Other churches have as many as seven sacraments. This includes confession, penance, confirmation, marriage and last rites.

Baptism is a sacramental means of 'entering' Christian community and the Christian life and Holy Communion is a means of 'sustaining' Christians in community and in their Christian life journeys.

7.5.2 – A 'sacramental union' involves a 'sign' and a 'thing signified.' In baptism the sign is water and the thing signified is 'forgiveness and new life in Christ.' In Holy Communion, the sign is bread and wine and the thing signified is 'the body and blood of our Lord' or, his very life.

7.5.3 – For a sacrament to be spiritually effective in our lives, it requires two things: one external to us and one internal to us. The Holy Spirit is external to us, but essential for our spiritual experience of the thing signified. Our faith and our spirit of repentance is what we internally bring to the experience.

But is repentance the only thing we bring? What about gratitude, openness, commitment and joy? Think about a child being brought for baptism or our gratitude

and openness to receiving Christ in Holy Communion. Repentance is one part but not the only part.

## 7.6: BAPTISM

7.6.1 – How is baptism a 'sign and seal' of our union with Christ? How do we 'share in the death and resurrection of Christ' through it, and 'commissioned to his service'? These statements have to be appropriated spiritually to make sense. Sign and seal have to be about some kind of assurance and confirmation publicly, which then gives us confidence and assurance internally. Death and resurrection are about a pattern in the spiritual life when we face various struggles and come through, gaining something even as we lose something or change comes. It's about dying to the old and rising up into newness. It's about dying to sin and rising up into love.

7.6.2 – The basics of baptism are explained. Baptism is legitimate if the three-fold name of God and water are used. Water's signification is also given.

7.6.3 – This section is not as clear. But the point intended is that the Holy Spirit works in the moment of baptism, but also throughout life. Baptism reflects God's attitude to us, which is always gracious love, but it is about this love meeting us in the very moment of baptism too. Children obviously don't understand what's happening to them when baptized. It is in their life-long journey that the meaning of baptism is experienced. What do you think?

7.6.4 – Baptism doesn't guarantee spiritual growth. God is working, but we have to be partners with God on the journey. Our job as a community of faith is to provide opportunities for faith to be nurtured.

7.6.5 – This final statement emphasizes that God's gracious love is there for us no matter what. Whether we succeed or fail on the spiritual journey, whether we do well or not so well, God's love for us is there. Baptism is intended to provide us with assurance and confidence.

Various Denominations on Baptism:

RC/Orthodox – Baptism of infants is essential for their eternal destiny. It's not optional. It can also be done privately. The community is secondary. It is the objective act that is necessary. Sprinkling of water is done in RC whereas Orthodox do the full dunking and then pour a little oil on the child's head too (anointing).

Reformational Protestantism – All infants are innocent and pure and eternally beloved of God. Baptism must be a choice of parents (if infants are being baptized) and it should be done publicly within the church, not privately, as it communicates official entry into the body of Christ. Sprinkling is fine as water is a symbol. Quantity is irrelevant.

Baptist/Mennonite/evangelical – Only adult baptism is legit because only adults can articulate consciously their faith in Christ. Full immersion is required because this is how it was done in the bible. The symbolism is dying to the old life and rising into new life with Christ (Romans 7)

## 7.7: HOLY COMMUNION

7.7.1 – Holy Communion is about 'remembering' Christ, but it is also about offering ourselves to Christ and receiving Christ's offering of himself to us. *Eucharist* is Greek for 'thanksgiving' and is a name for Holy Communion from the early centuries of the church.

7.7.2 – The Holy Spirit (external to us) creates in us an experience of connection with Christ, so that eating and drinking bread and wine becomes a taking of Christ into us and becoming one with him.

7.7.3 – We're supposed to receive something in Holy Communion: life and strength. The death of Jesus symbolized in the body and blood is an 'atoning sacrifice.' Christ gives something and pays something on our behalf. What is it we owe? Does atonement require 'sacrifice' a painful death and blood? Are there other ways we can conceptualize Christ giving his life and us taking him in by eating and drinking him?

7.7.4 – This section focusses on the thanksgiving we ought to experience in Holy Communion. We are thankful for our lives, our hope, and our anticipation of heaven and the new kingdom on earth as a place of feasting joy. Do such images speak to you?

7.7.5 – Some repetition here. Memorial, like remembering, is about the past, but there is also Christ's presence now, and the opportunity to express thanksgiving in interpreting Holy Communion as a gift signifying God's love in Christ given to us and for us.

Range of views on Holy Communion within Christianity:

1. Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox – Jesus' body and blood are literally in the bread and wine when the priest offers the words of institution. Those taking in Holy Communion literally take in Christ. The bread and wine are no longer bread and wine even if they still have that form. They are now Christ's literal body. 'Transubstantiation' is the word. In the "Mass" Christ is literally crucified for us again, and on the "alter" he is sacrificed anew for our salvation.

2. Lutherans believe Christ is also literally in the bread and wine but bread and wine still remain as bread and wine. Receiving the bread and wine with faith that it is Christ is also essential. 'Consubstantiation' is their word. Christ died once and for all and does not die all over again.

3. Reformed/Presbyterians also believe Christ is truly present in the bread and wine, but unless we receive it openly and with faith, it remains just bread and wine. Christ's body is in heaven with God, yet Christ is in the bread and wine and among us spiritually.

4. Other Protestants (e.g. Baptists, Mennonites, evangelicals) believe that Holy Communion is simply a memorial. We remember with faith and gratitude what Jesus did

for us on the cross, but Jesus isn't objectively present in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It's all about faith. What Christ did 2000 years ago is good enough.

Whatever views people hold, 4 is the most popular because it's most accessible. It's hard to get inside the idea that something magical/sacred/enchanted happens every time communion is celebrated at church with Christ especially present passing through the bread and wine into our stomachs and our hearts. We live in a secular dis-enchanted universe today. What do you think?

In some old-school Presbyterian traditions, people felt unworthy of taking communion if they weren't fully right with God. This also meant some were barred from communion if they were judged caught up in sin. They had to repent and be admitted by an elder of the church. This was traditionally called "fencing" the table. Every Christian denomination has some tradition of "fencing" or the "keys" (John 20:32: If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.") The traditional language of "communicant members" of the church or "communicants class" for teenagers is all about this too.

In RC churches, anyone outside the RC denomination and anyone who is not in full communion with the church and the pope, cannot receive communion. Pre-adolescents who are taught and affirm the RC doctrine are admitted in a whole ceremony (first communion). The church controls who gets into heaven.

What do you think?