

# **What does it mean to belong to St. Martin's?**

## **1. What our church believes:**

The Anglican world-wide church holds to a particular summary of biblical doctrine - namely the 39 Articles and other 'canons'. We don't put this confession of faith in place of the Bible, but we say the 'articles' are a true and accurate summary of what the Bible teaches. What follows is a summary of our most distinctive beliefs at St. Martin's as an Anglican church:

### **1. The Bible is true**

We have a 'high' view of the Bible. Jesus' scripture was the Old Testament. For him, whatever scripture says, God says (Matthew 15:4). He lived under their authority (Matthew 4:4). So, we believe if we are faithful to Christ, our church must hold a very 'high' view of the Bible. Jesus calls us to believe and obey what it says - even when it is not to our liking. We can't pick and choose what we will accept or reject from the Bible - otherwise we place ourselves above God's word rather than under it.

### **2. All of us are sinners**

We have a low view of ourselves as sinners apart from God's grace. We believe every person is a sinner at the core of his being and that apart from Jesus, sin rules his perspectives, motives, desires, purposes. This is how Jesus thinks of us - Mark 7:21-23. If we take Jesus seriously, the muck that we feel, think and do will never surprise us. We do not think that an act of sinning makes us a sinner - rather our corrupt nature gives rise to the whole array of sinful acts. We are perverse at the core and that gives rise to all sorts of evil.

### **3. God has revealed himself**

We believe that God has revealed himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - and that he is 'sovereign' (all things are under his sway - even falling sparrows). More than that, we believe God is so big that we would never come to Jesus in faith unless he brought us and made us able to come.

### **4. The cross is absolutely central**

Here we are at the heart of the gospel. We are held as captives of sin, and Jesus' death was the ransom price that bought our release from that bondage (Mark 10:45). We have a picture of what Jesus' death should mean to every Christian in the story of Barrabas in Matthew 27:15-26. Barrabas is released and Jesus is crucified.

## **5. Grace is utterly incredible**

Ask a Christian why God would send Jesus to die for him, why God would draw him to believe in Jesus, why God would care about someone who is evil at the core of his being – and he will have to say it doesn't make sense at all! But God is not conventional. Why would anyone care about a prostitute having forgiveness of sins? What father in his right mind would wrap his arms round a sticking prodigal? Who would assure a condemned criminal that he would be in paradise? There is no explanation except: That is the way God is – that is the way that Jesus delights to be.

## **6. Disciples are promised the presence of the Holy Spirit**

We believe that once God brings a sinner to Jesus, God places his life and presence into our souls by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:39). Jesus wants his people to know his daily presence and power.

## **7. All of life is holy – so we are to be whole-life disciples**

We believe Jesus rules and cares about all of life; nothing is outside his rule – whether business and politics, economics and education, science and sex, history and harvests, art and affliction, music and marriage, plumbing and preaching. All of life is holy and must be submitted to his reign. So, whether you play with your two-year old, wash dishes, make a business deal, preach a sermon, you are doing holy work.

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# **2. What our Church is**

Jesus promised, 'I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it'. We need to know what is the church according to the Bible so we have a measuring stick by which to judge St. Martin's Church. When you know what something is, then you might know what to do with it! So, with the church.

## **1. Three pictures of the church from the Bible**

- Christians are God's building, with Jesus at the foundation; and that building is a temple (1 Cor 3:1-17). And the big characteristic of a temple is that it is sacred. So sacred that anyone who dares to destroy God's people is headed for deep trouble.
- The Church is a bride – Jesus loves us and gave himself for us (Ephesians 5:22-33). If the church is a bride, that means she is dearly loved. Whenever we are tempted to grumble, we should instead seek to copy Jesus' attitude toward the church and love her.
- The church is also a body, so that as with the human body, there is both unity and diversity, and all the various parts are interdependent. Every part of the body needs every other part (1 Cor 12:12-26)

## 2. The local Church – like St. Martin’s - and how it functions

### There are three marks of a local Church:

- The preaching of the *word of God* (Acts 2:42). The local church can only remain a true church so long as it receives God’s truth in the scriptures. So at St. Martin’s, we put a lot of effort to provide biblical teaching that both informs the mind and stirs the feelings.
- The provision of the *sacraments*, administered and received in the right way and done because Jesus commanded it (Matthew 28:18-20 and 1 Cor 11:23)
- The practice of *discipline* – people are taught and called by ‘elders’ to shape their thoughts and lives to God’s requirements.

### How does St. Martin’s function?

- We are an *Anglican* Church – which means that oversight and control is exercised through a vicar, church wardens, PCC and bishops.
  - We are *reformed* – which means our doctrine or teaching flows from the Bible – from the faith taught in the Bible and rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. As already mentioned, we have a summary of our standards – the 39 Articles and the canons of the church of England. (This summary of essential doctrines is very useful – the Bible covers a lot of ground and it helps to have a digest of its teaching so we can see exactly what we believe.) Do you have to agree with everything in the 39 articles to belong to St. Martin’s? No. Our concern is whether you have are ‘in Christ’ rather than whether you agree with every doctrine. But if you think you can’t stomach this teaching, wisdom suggest that you should hold off joining.
  - We are a *particular group* of believers in a particular place – which means that you will probably find a real mixture of people! People who still struggle against sin and are enduring severe trials. Any number of our people have been through a lot of heavy weather – and the winds are still blowing. That means we may not always be smiling, upbeat people. No doubt there will be people who disappoint you and sometimes infuriate you – no rosy perfection here. Sometimes we will fail to care for each other as we ought. Sometimes we will ignore people so that they feel that they don’t matter. We are an imperfect body of believers convinced that Jesus loves us inspite of ourselves.
  - We are a church that seeks to *worship* God carefully and thoughtfully. We don’t want people simply attending church – we want them entering God’s presence and adoring him.
  - We encourage everyone to be ‘whole-life’ disciples of Jesus – which means that we urge everyone to take a hard look at the place where God has placed them in their weekday life and then to be a window there through which the rays of God’s light can splash out.
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### 3. How Christians live

What are the ways God uses to cause Christians to grow and mature in Christ? Growth comes from God, but he has 'means of grace' through which he usually brings growth and gives strength.

1. The *word of God* – you can hear the word of God through your personal reading of the Bible. As in the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, we believe there are times when listening to the word of God must take second place to the pressing needs of the moment.
2. The *sacraments* – baptism and the Lord's supper. These are God's authorised illustrations to prop up our weak faith. They press into our souls the conviction that God's goodness and mercy really will follow us all the days of our life. They are given to make us more sure of God's promises. Suppose a Christian comes to the Lord's supper and he is going through a difficult time and is wondering if the Lord has forsaken him. When he receives the bread and wine, it is as if Jesus says to them: 'You see, if I went this far for you in your sins, do you think I will cast you off in your trials?'
3. *Prayer* – if you are a Christian you will pray – or at least Jesus thought so (Matt 6:5)
4. *Worship* – worship is a hot topic in the church these days. We worship because God has commanded us to do so and because he is worthy of all praise. This means we must seek to develop a hunger for God himself
5. *Fellowship* – If God is our Father through Jesus, then all his children are our brothers and sisters – we are family. So we should be eager to spend time with each other. God channels his strength through others.