

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
8 August 2021

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

***“Free to Be:
A People Who Share Baptist Affiliation & Identity – Part I
An Exploration of our American Baptist Identity & Associations (Nationally)”***

Tenth Sermon in the 14-week summer series: Free to Be

Ephesians 1:15-23; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

New Revised Standard Version

All summer we’ve been exploring what it means to be Baptist, but today we look more specifically at our unique flavor (or type) of Baptist. Calvary is an American Baptist congregation. You may be thinking that that means, well, yes, we are Baptist and yes, we are in America – so that makes us American Baptist. But that is actually not what American Baptist means.

There are *many* Baptist associations across our country and world – Southern Baptists, National Baptists, Alliance of Baptists, Progressive Baptists, Cooperative Baptists, and the list goes on. On that list is the American Baptist Churches USA (or ABC or ABCUSA for short).

With all the freedom of the local church that Baptists embrace, you may wonder why being connected to other churches matters, but without that

connection we would not be able to accomplish all that we do for the *kin-dom* of God. Think about how difficult it would be for *one* local church to sponsor missionaries in multiple countries, or to educate clergy, train church leaders, write curriculum, respond to disaster relief needs, partner with community programs to address homelessness or economic disparity, engage in immigration and refugee ministries or racial justice.

We *need* the collective people-power and dollar-power and creative-power and prayer-power of other people of faith to truly BE the full Body of Christ, living and moving and serving in the world today. Both of our texts, Ephesians 1 and 1 Corinthians 12, speak beautifully to this. And one of the primary ways that Calvary partners with others to be a fuller Body of Christ is through

the American Baptist Churches USA.

Important note: ABC-USA is not a denomination in the same way that other mainline protestant churches are. “There is no ‘*The American Baptist Church*’ in the same way that there is ‘*The Presbyterian Church USA*’ or ‘*The Methodist Church*.’ This is why Baptist organizations are called “The American Baptist Churches USA,”¹ because it’s an association of churches working together laterally, rather than a denominational body governing churches from the top down. It’s an important distinction, even as (out of convenience) you will hear people refer to ABC as a denomination, rather than an association.

While there are about 42 million Baptists around the world, American Baptist Churches USA has 1.3-million members and over 5,000 congregations across the United States and Puerto Rico, and is the most racially diverse Protestant body in the states. American Baptists are known for our social and ethical application of the gospel. For example: we advocated for

freed African Americans following the Civil War, had leaders in the Civil Rights Movement (such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), advocated for women in church and societal leadership for many years, and have had ecological ministries for decades, among other important issues.² And as the ABC website states, “While [we are] not all of one mind as to how to deal with societal challenges, American Baptists do affirm the need to follow Christ’s example by being actively involved in changing society.”³ It is a hallmark of who we are, and it’s why we need each other.

To that point, the mission statement for ABC-USA is: *“American Baptists are a Christ-centered, biblically grounded, ethnically diverse people called to radical personal discipleship in Christ Jesus. Our commitment to Jesus propels us to nurture authentic relationships with one another; build healthy churches; transform our communities, our nations and our world; engage every member in hands-on ministry; and speak the prophetic word in love.*

¹ Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, pgs 38-39.

² Accessed on 8 August 2021 at <https://www.abc-usa.org/10facts/>.

³ Accessed on 8 August 2021 at <https://www.abc-usa.org/10facts/>.

As a people of prayer, purpose, and passion, we are in the forefront of creating a community of faith where people of every race, nationality and culture gather as one in worship, service and work.

The heart of the gospel is God's redemptive love. In our life together, the world will see the power of forgiveness to overcome alienation, the strength of love to transform hate, the power of grace to break the bonds of guilt, the triumph of hope over despair, and the victory of faith over doubt.

Through the cross of Christ we embrace the world as neighbor. Our vision for mission energizes a multitude of servant ministries of evangelism, discipleship, leadership, new church development, social justice, healing, peacemaking, economic development and education. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we work together in mutual submission, humility, love, and giving that the gospel might be preached and lived in all the world.”⁴

To fulfill this mission, ABC-USA is organized into four main branches, whose logos are on the cover of your Order of Worship:

- **American Baptist Home Mission Societies** – works in the United States and Puerto Rico on justice & advocacy ministries, community building, educational & leadership development, church planting & revitalization, healing ministries, & disaster relief
- **International Ministries** – supports missionaries and their ministry partners around the world
- **United in Christ/Together in Mission** is the **Office of the General Secretary** – supports many areas such as general operations, ordinations & accreditations, biennial gatherings, spiritual direction, creation justice, women in ministry, regional support, stewardship, and more
- **MMBB – the Ministers & Missionaries Benefits Board** – supports financial wellness and security for clergy, missionaries, and their families through retirement, disability, life

⁴ Accessed on 8 August 2021 at <https://www.abc-usa.org/mission-statement/>.

insurance, and other
financial services

Each of these four branches has their own website and their own mission statements, which I encourage you to explore – you can find them all by going through abc-usa.org. There is also information about each branch of ABC on the Missions Bulletin Board outside of the office, and there is a green handout in your Order of Worship today that tells you more about American Baptists in general, and then has a statement on racial justice that you will hear about in just a few minutes. We'll also link to this handout in the Enews this week.

The heart of today's message consists of three interviews with people connected to ABC-USA on the national level:

First, we will hear from **Rev. Mary A. Hulst**, who served as the **President of ABC-USA** for several years, experiencing the behind-the-scenes workings of ABC as she served at the helm of leadership for our American Baptist family.

Then we will hear an interview with **Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Jr.** – who serves on the **Anti-Racism Task Force**,

one of the ministry areas of American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

And finally, we'll hear from **Revs. David & Joyce Reed**, two of the **global servants** that Calvary supports – as they share with us about International Ministries.

Each interview will give you a peak into American Baptist Life. Between each interview we will transition by singing another verse of Hymn 696, *I'm Coming to Gather All Peoples of Earth*. Let's begin with Rev. Mary Hulst!

*Live Interview with
Rev. Mary A. Hulst
ABCUSA President (2008-2010)*

*Recorded Interview with
Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Jr.
ABCUSA Anti-Racism Task Force
Member*

*Recorded Presentation with
Revs. Joyce & David Reed
ABCUSA International Ministries
Global Coordinators for Spiritual
Care*

What a gift to hear from these special guests. As my predecessor at Calvary, Rev. Dr. Brian Henderson, says: *“there is more we can do together than any one of us can do on our own.”* Today was Part I of our introduction to American Baptist Life which focused on the **national** level, and next week, we’ll dive into Part II by looking at our **regional** level connections with ABC.

As we conclude Part I today, we are going to pray together for the people and ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA. In your Order of Worship, there are yellow sheets which have global servants on them or a specific ministry of ABC-USA. You are invited to share what is on your sheet with those in your immediate family/COVID bubble and pray together for the people/ministries or if you prefer to stay socially distanced, you may spend some moments praying on your own for the ministry pages you received.

If you are worshipping online, you may find a ministry or missionary to pray for listed at the links you see on your screen (abc-usa.org/how-we-serve/all-abc-ministries/ OR portal.internationalministries.org

[g/find-a-global-servant](#)) or pray for one of the ministries or missionaries you learned about today.

As we pray together, Denise will play music for reflection on the piano and then after a few minutes, I will gather us back together by inviting us all to pray together the Lord’s Prayer.

Music for Reflection

*We Cannot Measure How Your Heal
Heal Me, Hands of Jesus
Sing the Love of God Creating
O Lord, Who Came to Earth
In the Bulb*

Lord, holding these prayers for our American Baptist siblings before you, and joining our voices across generations with all of your faithful disciples, we pray together:

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the
power and the glory forever. Amen.**