**Once more, with Spirit!**

Unity Church May12, 2024

Genesis 1:2-3 John 15:26-16:15

I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of Saints; the forgiveness of Sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

As we come to the end of our series on “the Basics,” I am torn, as I have been throughout writing it, on what to leave in and what to leave out. When we took 3 Sundays to look at the first statement, Sherry warned me that I didn’t have 15 weeks to spend on the entire creed. I feel like I have given short shrift to the longest part, the section on Jesus Christ, but realize that Jesus is the primary focus of most of my preaching.

So today we come to what I often think of as the laundry list at the end of the creed. It’s not a list of everything else, but at first glance it appears to be. In talking about the history of the Creed, I pointed out that it developed, or was refined over a period of almost 6 centuries. Last week we compared it to the Nicene Creed to look at how they both were used to refute various heresies that sprang up over the years. Although the Apostle’s Creed was not written at a definite time and place, over the years it has had phrases added which specifically address counter arguments.

I said last week that the Nicene Creed is the Apostle’s Creed that went to college. In its brevity and concise lines, it may not go into the detail that the Nicene Creed does, but it hits the important ones. One is instructive, the other is a personal declaration. Let’s look at these final 6 declarations, one by one.

1

I believe in the Holy Ghost. It’s always troubled me that this is all the ink that the Holy Spirit gets in this creed. It seems like an after thought, sort of like an, “Oh, by the way, there’s this” sort of thing. Actually, it’s not. It may surprise you to know that the most controversial part of writing the Nicene creed was the section on the Holy Spirit. In fact it is still a point of controversy between the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Rite churches. The reality is, if describing the historic Jesus Christ is difficult, imagine defining that which is entirely spirit, without shape, figure, form, whatever. It is truly like trying to draw a picture of wind. So the Apostle’s Creed simply says, “I believe,” the rest is up to the believer and the Holy Spirit.

The modern church tends to preach almost exclusively about Jesus Christ, the old testament is too bloody and that spirit thing gives folks the heebeegeebees. If a person walked in off the street with no background in the Bible, they would think that the only thing that is worshiped or taught is Christ. Yet the Holy Spirit shows up in scripture before Jesus does. The spirit is mentioned in the second verse of the bible, Jesus in the 26th. Not that this is a way of measuring importance, but it makes us wonder why the Holy Spirit gets such short shrift in today’s church.

Most of us have a rough time getting our heads around the idea of the Trinity. We hear scriptures like Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!” and we try to compare them to the story of Christ’s baptism, where we see all three faces of God, that is, Jesus being baptized, the Holy Spirit descending as a dove and the voice of the Father saying, “This is my Son in whom I am well pleased,” and we think, “How can God be one and three, at the same time?”

It seems that when we try to describe the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves somehow limiting Him, almost like he’s an add on to God. It amazes me that over the past 2000 years people haven’t come up with specific language or really good analogies to teach about the Holy Spirit. Maybe the problem is that we are trying to define God, or an aspect of God through the limitations of our human existence. This is not an excuse so much as a recognition.

2

I realized when we were talking about God as the creator of heaven and earth, that we are incapable of imagining the creative power of the Father. We can’t imagine the ability to simply think, “I’d like a garage out back,” and boom, there it is, complete, finished, and better than any garage ever built. That is a tiny example of the creative power of God, the mind of God. We are even less capable of imagining or fathoming the limitless ability of God to be all places at once, to transcend time and space. As David says in the Psalms, “Your ways are too wonderful, I cannot attain them.”

Why am I talking about God in a sermon on the Holy Spirit? That creative power of God, that ability to communicate with each of us, the reality of God’s or Christ’s presence with us always, is the Holy Spirit. Don’t ask me how He accomplishes this, I will simply point you back to David. But we do know that Jesus explained, not how, but what the Holy Spirit does in today’s scripture reading from John.

Jesus says, “When He, (the Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.” He also said, “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth!” Do you remember that scripture from Romans that says, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us?” How did any of us recognize that we were sinners, and needed to accept Jesus Christ as our personal savior? What is that thing that we call a guilty conscious? You know, that little voice that reminds us that what we did or didn’t do at 3:47 last Wednesday, was wrong. That voice, that idea, that nudge, that push, that inspiration, that, is the Holy Spirit at work.

1st Corinthians 12 lists and talks about the Gifts of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22 lists the fruit of the Spirit:**“**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” I would say that both lists are not complete. But what they do is show us an inkling of the ways that our Father God waits to bless us. I would also encourage each of us to learn more about the Holy Spirit, because He is the Spiritual Christ who dwells among us, always.

We will spend more time with the Holy Spirit next Sunday on Pentecost, and the following Sunday on Trinity Sunday. You have been warned

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Moving on to the remaining statements of the Creed, “I believe in the Holy catholic church,” Even though this phrase bothers or troubles a lot of good Protestants, it doesn’t mean what you think it means. It does not, repeat does not, refer to the Roman Catholic church. I had someone confess to me that they skip over this line every Sunday, for that very reason. “Catholic,” small “c,” comes from the Greek word, “katholikos” which means universal, global, whole.

The writer of the book of Hebrews implies that we are not only part of the global church, but also the church that has gone before. Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Those witnesses are our loved ones and all the saints who have died in the grace of Jesus Christ.

“I believe in the Communion of Saints.” I think that this phrase speaks to two aspects of the faith, the Lord’s Supper, and also communion as in sharing each other’s burdens. The first is pretty self explanatory, we were taught by Jesus to celebrate this meal, to remember his death till he comes. The second is also a commandment of Christ: “This is my commandment that you love one another,” or, “the second is like unto it, that you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

“The Forgiveness of Sins.” Paul writes in Romans 5:9-11, **“**Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?” If one looks this up in the on-line concordance, there are 4 pages of various citations that through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, we are forgiven.

“The Resurrection of the Body,” here again, two different implications, both scriptural: the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave and the physical resurrection of the dead in Christ, at the second coming. A side note here, (on Mother’s day) my mother was dead set opposed to cremation. As I told her, if God was able to restore a body that had been buried for a 1000 years, He is quite capable of doing the same thing from ashes.

4

I said earlier that there were phrases added to the creed to oppose heresy, this is one of them. During the early stages of the church, there was a teaching called Docetism, which held that Jesus Christ was actually spirit, not flesh. They taught that He didn’t really die on the cross, but only appeared to do so. If there was no death, there could be no resurrection.

“The Life Everlasting.” This is one of the primary hopes of our faith. It is based on the first piece of scripture that most of us memorized as children, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, would not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“Amen!” We say this and sing it and yes it is part of the Creed, not just something that was tacked on at the last minute. Amen is a transliteration of Old Testament Hebrew, (Ah-mane,) it is a statement of certainty or affirmation. It basically means, “So be it!”

Each time we stand and say what we believe as fellow Christians, we are stating a collection of faith statements that go back nearly 2000 years. It is not Scripture, it doesn’t replace scripture, although every declaration in the creed is grounded in Scripture. Most of us think of it as something that is traditionally said during worship, we should say it to ourselves in private, at home, in the car and think about each part of it. It is a tool for getting our heads around our basic theological beliefs. It is a step toward our never ending desire to a greater understanding of the God who made us, through his Son saved us, through His Spirit abides with us and through His church moves forward in history.

Amen!

5

Genesis 1:1-2 RSV

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

John 15:26-16:15 NRSV

26 “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.”

16:1 “I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. 3 And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. 4 But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11 about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”