

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Hold Firmly

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

What you have just heard, and maybe have spoken with me, was the Nicene Creed, agreed upon at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD. It was an early confession of the church, or what we call a confession of faith, about the nature of God - one God, three

persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Churches have continued to create confessions of faith, even to this day, but this Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed are still used today.

Still, of what importance or even relevance is there in having or reciting a confession of faith for us today? Many believe what they believe and how they believe, well because it works for them, not giving much thought to the why. Is it though, that a confession of faith is a grounding for our faith, a place to anchor, or hold firmly so that our work, our ministry, our lives, and our faith make sense? A way to know that we are not being willy-nilly about what makes one a Christian?

You see, for an onlooker the church may appear to be another volunteer organization that tries to do its best for others, similar to other service organizations, many of which do really good work, often better than the church itself. Some may only see the church as a place that has created more harm than good. In this climate it can be hard to not be majorly influenced by the current culture. We know that the church in North America, in Canada is in decline. Yet for many of us, we also know that there is a deeper truth, a reason for why we continue in our belief and in the church when so many say they are Christians, but no longer attend church. We know this truth even if we cannot articulate it. Which is why confessions of faith are important.

For the Apostle Paul, the writer of this first letter to the Corinthians, there was a confession of faith that had been part of the knowledge of the church for some time. He shared it as “first importance...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” (vv3-5)

It is that simple and that complex and deep...Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised. Now if you don't believe that you are sinful, then you won't even know how to interpret this, but for those of us who believe that we can't get through a day without getting something wrong in our relationship with others and with the one who created us, that we are not doing a very good job of being image bearers of God, well this is something to hold firmly to.

For those who think that the resurrection was or is a nonstarter, Paul shares what seems to be common knowledge at the time, that the resurrected Christ showed himself to others so that there would be witnesses to the resurrection, there was Cephas, the twelve, and then “more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time...then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,” and finally to Paul himself. To believe in the resurrection was to believe the scriptures, which in Paul's time were only the Hebrew scriptures. The New Testament did not exist for Paul. His letters became part of those scriptures for us.

This confession of faith, this place of grounding, of sharing with the Corinthians something that was worth holding firmly too, comes near the end of Paul's letter to the

church there. A church that was fiercely divided and questioning. And after all that Paul has written to help rectify and address the situation, he is ending his letter with a conversation about the foundation of our faith which is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what makes the Christian church, well, Christian. For all the good or harm the church has done, it does not take away from why we are Christians. Our distortion of the gospel that allows us to be saved by the grace of God, through Christ, does not take away from the meaning of God's act to reconcile creation, people, and the world to God whose love between the Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit overflowed into the creation of the world.

When we believe, when we confess our belief in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, when we know the transforming power of grace, then we trust that we have something of value to share with others. That sharing can come through various forms of ministry, work, and service, but sharing God's love, compassion, and grace with others becomes a way of life, and will draw others to faith. Not because you profess from a mountain top, but because you took time to care, love, and yes, say a few words when appropriate to show the why of what you do and believe as you do.

For how can anyone know about the love of God if we never speak about how it has changed us, shaped us, has given us something to hold firmly, and the grace that we have experienced because we know of God's love.

Paul knew that grace. Paul, a man that had once persecuted those who followed the way of Jesus, who watched over the murder of Stephen, and request to be sent out to destroy the church, that man knew the transforming power of God's grace. It was because of the risen Christ that Paul was completely changed.

Now your transformation may not be as abrupt or feel as much as a 180 that was Paul's, but over time we are shaped by our belief in a Saviour and a God that loved so much "that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

That eternal life starts today, not in some here after, but right now. Take hold of the grace that is offered to you, hold firmly to the confession that Christ died for your sins and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day, because that is a story of love, the love of God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.