

First Presbyterian Church



Theological Declaration of Barmen

Why Creeds?

At its core, a creed is a statement of basic beliefs or set of guiding principles. Organizations of all shapes, sizes, and persuasions have used creeds to instruct members, guide their decision making, and remind themselves of their core identity while they seek out new ways of being in a world in a constant state of flux. Creeds are crafted to remind people of where they have been while also offering guidance for where they may be going. In this 150th anniversary year of First Presbyterian Church, it seemed a good idea to study some of the creeds that are foundational to the faith we proclaim. During the course of lent, we will take a brief look at a set of creeds that range from ancient to surprisingly modern. We'll learn a bit about their social and historical context and consider what they may mean for our contemporary lives of faith. It is our hope that this study provides depth and illumination for your lenten journey.

Theological Declaration of Barmen*

Almost immediately following Adolf Hitler's election as Chancellor in 1933, Protestant Christians in Germany faced pressure to fully align their churches with the Nazi party. Many Churches succumbed to the pressure and embraced ideas such as expelling church members who did not adhere to the "aryan ideal" or had any non-Christian ancestry. Pro-Nazi churches and Christians became part of a movement known as "German Christians" and sought to create a national church that was to be governed by the state and would adhere to what was known as the "Führer Principle," which held that the word of the Führer (Hitler) took precedence over anything else, including any written law. It is within this context of increasing machinations of the "German Christians," supported by the Nazi regime, to control and subjugate the Protestant Churches in Germany, that the Theological Declaration of Barmen was written.

In 1934, Protestant church leaders and members from a variety of denominations gathered in Barmen to create a statement outlining their objections to the growing German Christian movement. The statement that emerged was written primarily by Karl Barth and incorporates six different articles of faith, each supported by scripture, which together clarify the sovereignty and autonomy of the Church. The Barmen Declaration also speaks to the responsibility of the Church (and thereby its members) to hold the state accountable to acts of injustice and cruelty.

Within its setting in history, the Barmen Declaration was critically important, and it remains so to this day. It insists that the Church cannot be used as a tool of the state and that there is no realm of life in which believers are not first governed by Jesus, their lord and savior. These declarations continue to affect how we go about living lives of faith to this very day.

*Much of the information in this synopsis comes from two websites. If you'd like, you can explore them further via the links below.

https://www.ucc.org/beliefs_barmen-declaration/

<https://elca.org/JLE/Articles/1292>

The Confession

While certainly easier to get through than the Scots Confession, The Theological Declaration of Barmen is still a bit much to put here. Portions of it are included with the daily prayers, and if you'd like to read it in full, you can do so at the following link:

https://www.ucc.org/beliefs_barmen-declaration/

Scripture and Prayers

Each day during the week ahead return to this scripture passage. Read it silently. Read it aloud. Read it to your children, partner, friends, or dog. Read it differently every day if you want but hear the words again and again and let them sink into your being. If you have questions, thoughts, or insights write them down!

Let these words become a part of your life.

Ephesians 4:1-6, 14-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Monday, March 13

"Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death." Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.11

So many noises, so many voices, swirling and calling and giving me choices. Which one do I follow? Which way should I go? And how can I tell if they're true or quite faux? "Come with me; I'm the one!" says some loud puff of air. Then another, still louder, is heard to declare: "In me you'll find meaning; a salve for your fear!" Such are the claims that ring in my ear. Help me to find, through cacophonous din, your true Word that offers redemption for sin. None before you, O God, shall I follow or place, trusting only in you and your glorious grace.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
What Word of God must you hear?

Tuesday, March 14

"As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's claim upon our whole life." The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.14

I admit, O God, that there are places and times and moments when I forget who I am. Everywhere I go, I am, first and foremost, a child of your redeeming. Before I am a fan, I am your child. Before I am a citizen, I am your child. Before I am a friend, an employee, a boss, a grandparent, a colleague, a cool uncle, or anything else, I am your child. The whole of my life, O God, is found in you. Everywhere I go, I am your child. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
What would it mean for God to govern the whole of your life? When are the moments that you forget you belong to God?

Wednesday, March 15

"We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions." The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.18

I'm amazed by what trees can withstand. Pushed and pulled, yet they don't move. Frozen and thawed, yet they hold place. And it is, in large part, because of their roots, grown and woven into the earth until the two become nigh inseparable, very nearly one. Help us, O God, to put down such roots in you, in your Son, in the Holy Spirit, in your Church, and in one another. Help us to grow so deeply and so thoroughly that we cannot be pulled from you by the temptations of worldly possessions, earthly notoriety, or smooth-talking hucksters. Help us, O God, to stand firm in you and you alone. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What winds of life pull you from God the most?

Thursday, March 16

"The various officers in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation." The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.20

Let, O God, the vision of Acts be known and lived among us. Let our church be a place where all live together in peace and provide for one another as any have need. May our fellowship become a circle of friends that only ever widens, embracing all and making space for one another. Let those who gather here, who call this place home, treat one another with equity and mutual respect, recognizing that we are all sinning saints. You, O God, are our only Lord. All of the rest of us are your servants in the service of others. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What effect does perceived status have on the way you treat others? What would it be like to live in a status-free world?



Friday, March 17

“We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.” The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.24

Perhaps, O God, you’ve given us enough to do. To tend to the affairs of the divine ought to keep us busy enough. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the outcast, and to care for the vulnerable is plenty, isn’t it? To say nothing of strengthening the fainthearted and supporting the weak. Help us, O God, to keep our focus on tending to the work you have given us: to feed Jesus’ sheep. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What is the Church’s special commission? How can you join in that work?

Saturday, March 18

“We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.” The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.27

Let us, O God, approach the Holy gifts we have been given with true awe and wonder. Let us not subvert the gospel by using it to meet our own needs. Let us not use your words to justify our own selfish human desires, our own self-aggrandizement, or our own whims and fancies. This faith we have been handed is a thing beyond ourselves. Help us, O God, not to sully or tarnish it by using it to gain that which we think we need. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Have you seen the Word of God misused? How do we avoid such things?

Thoughts and Notes From the Week

Holy Week

Maundy Thursday - April 6 at 7 p.m.

Honoring the Last Supper - Sanctuary

Good Friday - April 7 at 7 p.m.

The Shadow of the Cross - Sanctuary

Prayer Vigil - Good Friday through Easter Morning

Chapel or at Home

Easter Sunday - April 9 at 8:30 & 10:30

Both services to feature choir, bells and brass

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