

First Presbyterian Church

WE
Believe

The Creeds of the Church
Lent 2023, Week 4

The Confession of 1967

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.

The Confession of 1967

The Confession of 1967 arises from a denomination that found itself attempting to chart a new course through uncharacteristically unique times. In 1958, the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had merged to become the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA). Confusing, I know. At that time, the General Assembly gathered a committee and tasked them with the creation of a brief statement of faith that would serve as a foundational document for the new denomination. In particular, the committee was asked to revise the Westminster Standards that had served as the sole defining document of Presbyterian theology since the 17th century. However, upon study, the committee felt that instead of revising or dispensing of Westminster, the new denomination would be better served to write a new confession that would speak specifically to their current context. The ultimate result of this process is The Confession of 1967 (C-67).

There are three sections in the confession, each of which focuses on the primacy of reconciliation within the Christian faith. The first, titled “God’s Work of Reconciliation,” describes how God, through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, reconciled human beings to the Divine. The second, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” describes the ways in which those who have been reconciled to God are called to join in the work of reconciliation in the world. The third and final section, titled “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation,” affirms the Christian hope that the entirety of the world will one day be reconciled with God and that the peaceable kingdom of God will become a lived reality.

C-67, influenced by new interpretive movements and a deepening understanding of the social and historical context of Biblical writings, speaks directly to its day and age. The call to reconciliation (literally the restoration of friendly relations) spoke directly to church members who found themselves in the midst of great cultural upheaval. Distrust between generations, war and the threat of nuclear devastation, racial animosity, women’s liberation, and a host of other issues seemed to be pulling families, communities, and institutions apart at the seams. It was into that divided world that the Confession of 1967 spoke a prophetic word. It is a word that has no shortage of things to offer for our divided context as well.

The Creed

The Confession 1967 is again too long to include in full. Portions of it will be included with each daily prayer. If you'd like, a copy of the confession can be found at the following link:

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/confess67.pdf

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.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Monday, March 20

“In every age, the church has expressed its witness in words and deeds as the need of the time required. Confessional statements have taken such varied forms as hymns, liturgical formulas, doctrinal confessions, catechisms, theological systems in summary, and declarations of purpose against threatening evil.” The Confession of 1967, 9.02

O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, come and fill our hearts with your peace. Our hope is built on nothing less than you. You are our strength when we are weak. You satisfy the hungry heart. You are holy. You are blessed. Those who dwell in your shelter shall go out in joy. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Remind us of how great you are and help us to stand upon your promises. All glory, laud, and honor to you, O God, we raise. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Where did you learn the faith? How are you teaching it to others?

Tuesday, March 21

“God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd’s life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God’s love for humankind. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God’s reconciling work.” The Confession of 1967, 9.09

Deep and wide, the old song taught me, is the expanse of your love for me. Such a thing always seemed silly and a bit vague, but maybe it is all the truth I need. Maybe it is all the truth I can know. Your love is deep. How deep? *Deep enough to cover all your faults.* Your love is wide. How wide? *Wide enough to welcome all, to love all, to make room at the table eternally for yet one more.* Deep and wide. Deep and wide. That’s all the truth I need. That’s all the truth I can know. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What is reconciliation? What does it feel like? What does it look like?

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Wednesday, March 22

"The new life takes shape in a community in which people know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no one has any ground on which to stand, except God's grace." The Confession of 1967, 9.22

What a bunch of bumbling fools we must seem to you, O God. Not much more than a collection of left feet that cannot help but trip over ourselves, at least a little, every time we go to do something. We mark. We scar. We hurt and neglect. And still we are your children. And still we are loved. And still we are your Church. May we, O God, love as we have been loved. May we forgive as have been forgiven. May we live peaceably with all. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
How does God's love free you to love others?

Thursday, March 23

"The church disperses to serve God wherever its members are, at work or play, in private or in the life of society. Their prayer and Bible study are part of the church's worship and theological reflection. Their witness is the church's evangelism. Their daily action in the world is the church in mission to the world. The quality of their relation with other persons is the measure of the church's fidelity." The Confession of 1967, 9.37

Your church, O God, lives as I live; it breathes as I breathe. If I am cruel, then the church is cruel. If I am kind, then the church is kind. In my words, my thoughts, and all of my actions, I am either giving or failing to give voice to you. Help me, O God, not to go to church but to be church. Help me not to listen to prayer but to be prayer. Help me not to receive your peace but to be your peace in the world. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
If you are the church, what good things does that say about the church? If you are the church, what might others think the church is lacking?

Friday, March 24

“The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights.” The Confession of 1967, 9.44

“The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace.” 9.45

“The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations.” 9.46

In these words and in these clear callings, I am reminded that my faith is not really about me. My faith is about others. Grant me, O God, eyes to see the pain of others. Give me ears to hear the cries of my neighbors. Help my life to be a blessing in all of the spheres and realms in which I travel. Let me practice what I’ve heard preached. Let me apply your love, forgiveness, and justice to the world. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
How do you live out your beliefs?

Saturday, March 25

“With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.” The Confession of 1967, 9.55

I find myself often waiting for hope to emerge. Given time, the grass will be green again, the trees shall bud, and fresh shoots shall emerge from the ground. Given space, broken hearts will be healed, relationships can be mended, and families can learn to love again. With work and dedication, communities can be restored, systems changed, and health, in all its forms, can be nurtured. We wait and work, O God, in fractured lives in a fractured world. Remind us of your hope. Remind us of your reconciliation. Assure us again that all will be well in you. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
What hope are you waiting to see fulfilled?

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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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LIVING A LEGACY OF LOVE



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
HASTINGS, NEBRASKA