

First Presbyterian Church



The Nicene Creed

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.

Nicene Creed

Now nearly two thousand years old, the Nicene Creed continues to serve as a foundational text for adherents to the Christian faith. Its brief text sets out the core beliefs of Christianity, and it continues to guide and persuade both professional and lay theologians alike.

The creed, as we know it today, is the result of two separate church councils (think of them as world-wide church summits), which took place in Nicea and Constantinople in 325 CE 381 CE respectively. These councils were called together to address the major theological questions of the time in hopes of bringing unity to the still-fledgling church.

Among the most pressing questions to early church bishops and leaders was just how monotheistic this monotheism really was. How could Christians consider themselves to be monotheists and yet hold that both the God of Israel and Jesus were divine? As a means of solving this little puzzle, a gentleman by the name of Arius began to promote a theory. Arius proposed that Jesus was essentially God's first creation and that God created Jesus (or the Word) in order to save the world once it had fallen into sin. Therefore, the Word incarnate (Jesus) was not the same as God but rather a divine agent who was above the rest of creation, but nonetheless, a created thing itself.

The council of Nicea roundly rejected such a claim as the church insisted that there is one God, as opposed to God and lesser gods. The language used in the creed goes out of its way to make this point. When describing Jesus, the creed uses no fewer than six separate phrases to describe the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. This is done in order to explain that not only are the two equally divine; they are also inseparable.

Most notable among these phrases is "of one Being with the Father." This phrase relies on the Greek word *homoousios*, which translates as "of one substance." The Son and God are of the same substance. They are of the same form. This Son, which, the creed insists, was "begotten not made," then became known to humans as Jesus in the incarnation.

This creed, which places such a heavy emphasis on the unity of the divine, has served as the major unifying document for Christians throughout the centuries. To this day, the Nicene Creed is the one text that is upheld by Christians throughout the world. Many denominations and faith traditions have added other creeds and clarifications over the years, but the Nicene Creed continues to serve as the foundational theological text upon which all Christians build their faith.



The Creed

Read through the creed paying attention to the moments and phrases which emphasize the unity of the divine. What unity is this creed asking you seek?

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 only 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.

*WE
Believe*

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.

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Monday, February 27

Triune God, we sometimes feel ourselves coming apart at the seams. Pushed and pulled this way and that, we struggle to know who we are and what truly matters to us. Help us to be one with ourselves, one with our families and friends, one with our neighbors, enemies, and strangers. Remind us, dear Lord, that we don't need to live disparate lives, being one thing here and another thing here and yet another someplace else. Rather, you call us to live lives that are consistently united with your heart, no matter where we may be or with whom we may find ourselves. Draw us, O God, back to unity with ourselves and back to being one in you. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day
How might you seek greater unity with God?



Tuesday, February 28

Today, O God, I thank you for the foundations of my faith. I thank you for all of those who have come before me to set out the ways of faith: for theologians who have asked penetrating questions, for scholars who have uncovered hidden meanings, for translators who have made the word understandable, for preachers and teachers who have made it digestible, for all the saints and sinners who have led me, who have shown me, who have built up for me a foundation of faith, I offer you my thanks and praise. Their wisdom has accumulated. It has piled up in heaps and gobs. It is I who have benefitted. It is I who stand upon their shoulders. Help me, O God, to pull up yet another disciple to stand now upon mine. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Who or what has served as your faith foundation? Who will stand upon the foundation you are building?

Wednesday, March 1

Your light sustains me, O God. In my moments of worry and anxiety, its presence reminds me that I am not alone. In my times of grief and sorrow, its gentle beacon insists that there is a way forward. The light of your mercy, forgiveness, and salvation enlivens my sinful heart and restores me to the pathways of righteousness. As I move through this season of Lent, I know there will be moments of difficulty and hardship. Grant, O God, that I may have your light to see me through. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Where do you see God's light in your life? Where do you see God's light in the world?

Thursday, March 2

It occurs to me, O God, that I often encounter you through the actions of others. John the baptizer testified to Jesus and led others to him. The leaders and theologians laid out the tenets of faith in the Nicene Creed. It is most frequently the actions of someone else that bring me to some realization, some moment of peace, some time of presence with the divine. I'm thankful for hymn writers and prayer practitioners. I'm inspired by volunteers and generous givers. I'm overjoyed when a child makes things simple for me. I'm left agog when I see your Spirit march in the streets, feeding hungry stomachs and caring for the sick and vulnerable. For all of those who lead me to you, for all of those who testify to your love and truth, I offer my thanks and praise. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Whose testimony do you follow? What testimony does your life offer?

Friday, March 3

As Jesus prepared to face crucifixion, he offered a prayer to you saying, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they *may all be one*. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Help us, O God, to be truly united so that our testimony may have more strength. Help us to be truly loving so that others will believe us when we say it is important. Help us to be truly forgiving so that others may be convinced that forgiveness can change the world. Help us to be truly merciful, kind, and generous with one another so that others may come to see the beauty of our faith. Let us not be pulled apart by politics, greed, and self-importance. Let us remain devoted to one another and devoted to you so that our lives may carry your glory into the world. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What divisions are harming the Christian faith? How can you help heal them?

Saturday, March 4

There is much about you, O God, that I cannot fully understand. The Trinity is only the beginning. I do not always understand why you love me or why you forgive me or why you ask me to be a part of your kingdom. I do not understand, not fully, how you cause the tree to grow or the mother cat to care for her kittens. How is it that harmonies can sound so pleasing? That certain words can seem so right? How, creator of all things, can a hug be so consoling, a warm meal so welcoming, and a knowing smile so inviting? There are mysteries in life that I will never solve and riddles I will never fully parse. But I do not need to solve them in order to know that they are good and to realize that they bring warmth and beauty into the world. Help me, O God, to cherish these and other wonderful mysteries. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What do you not fully understand and yet fully love?

Thoughts and Notes From the Week

LIVING A LEGACY OF LOVE



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HASTINGS, NEBRASKA

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Scots Confession

Why Creeds?

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Scots Confession

Confessions, as opposed to creeds, are understood to address specific needs and questions of their time. Confessions are meant to say, essentially, “This is how we see things right here and right now.” The Scots Confession is certainly a document of its time. Written in 1560 the document is the result of great political and religious upheaval. The political upheaval had to do with who would control Scotland. The religious upheaval was to do with what we now call The Reformation.

Guided by the principles of scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone, reformers all throughout Europe dating back to the 14th century had sought to make changes within the Roman Catholic Church. In Scotland, this movement came to a head when, in 1560, during a brief moment of political independence, the Scottish Parliament directed six protestant reformers to lay out the foundation of the Reformed Faith in Scotland. The resulting Scots Confession is, at times, harshly polemic even while expressing many of the core tenets to which the Presbyterian Church still assents.

Scholar Rev. Dr. David B. Calhoun identifies five “guideposts” or governing principles within the Scots Confession. They are an insistence on the glory of God alone, an appeal to the authority of the Word of God, an acknowledgement of the gift of Christ, a reminder of the gift of grace, and an outline of the marks of the church. In 1560, these five guideposts set the path of reformation in Scotland, and they continue to offer direction for our faith today.

The Confession

Consisting of twenty-five chapters, the Scots Confession is not as easily digestible as the Nicene Creed. So instead of reading it all at once, we will include portions of it with each daily prayer. If you’d like to read it all at once, you can find it online here: <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-scots-confession-1560/>

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!

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Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Monday, March 6

“We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom we put our trust.” - Scots Confession, Chapter I

There is so much, O God, that calls for our attention, that demands our focus and our allegiance. We're asked to swear by political parties and economic philosophies. We're asked to pledge ourselves to governments and principalities. A multitude of brands and teams and corporations would greatly appreciate it if we would place them before everything else in our lives. But during this season of Lent, we return our hearts, our lives, and our ultimate loyalty to You. You alone do we worship. You alone do we serve. Above and before all else, we pledge ourselves to you. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What does it mean to place God before all other things in your life?

Tuesday, March 7

“That our Lord Jesus offered himself a voluntary sacrifice unto his Father for us, ... that he was wounded and plagued for our transgressions, that he, ... was condemned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the judgment seat of our God” - Scots Confession, Chapter IX

We thank you, O God, for your willingness to come to us and join our imperfection. We thank you for the love so clearly demonstrated through the birth, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We confess that the cruel indignities that Jesus suffered continue to be suffered by people today. Many are mocked. Many are scarred. Many are falsely sentenced. Many have their lives ended too soon by abuses of power. The death of your Son brought with it a type of redemption. Let the world now be redeemed so that still more may not need to suffer such indignities. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Whom do you see suffering? How might you help them?



Wednesday, March 8

“We undoubtedly believe, since it was impossible that the sorrows of death should retain in bondage the Author of life, that our Lord Jesus crucified, dead, and buried, who descended into hell, did rise again for our justification,... and brought life again to us who were subject to death and its bondage.” - Scots Confession, Chapter X

During this season when we move so close to the cross, we ask that you bring a new life to us. Give us again the courage to love you and our neighbors. Restore within us the joy of your creation. Heal our wounded hearts. Console our sorrow. Ease our anxiety. Assure us again that ear has not heard, nor eye seen, nor human imagination envisioned the consolation you intend for your servants. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What new life is God calling you to live into?

Thursday, March 9

*“Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers with us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost... who sanctifies us and bring us into all truth by his own working”
-Scots Confession, Chapter XII*

We have not, O God, encountered you by our own merit. Whatever divine wisdom we have procured, whatever holy insight has illuminated our lives has not come by our own effort. The assurance of our salvation, the knowledge of our identity as your children, the calling to live as your disciples has come to us through your revelation. We thank you for the many varied ways that you reveal yourself. We remember with joy when Jesus breathed upon his followers and gifted them with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

How might God be speaking to you these days?

Friday, March 10

“God has given to man his holy law, in which... those (works) which please him and which he has promised to reward are commanded.... (O)ne is done to honor God, the other to the profit of our neighbor, and both have the revealed will of God as their assurance.”

It is your grace that saves us, and our works are the gratitude we show. In thanksgiving for your tender mercy, help us to deal graciously with our neighbors, our strangers, and our so-called enemies. As we rejoice in your eternal love, help us to love you with the whole of our beings. Grant, O God, that our very selves may become living embodiments of the kindness, generosity, peace, patience, gentleness, and faithfulness that we have received. You have told us, O God, what is good. Help us to live humble lives overflowing with loving-kindness and insistent-justice. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What good works are happening in the world today? How can you join them?

Saturday, March 11

“(W)e assuredly believe that by Baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted, and also that in the Supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us that he becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls.” - Scots Confession, Chapter XXI

“Engrafted” means inseparable, right? It means that the two become one, don’t they? I looked it up. It means that you sustain me. That I draw my sustenance from your roots. That your bark eventually enfolds me, covers me, offers me its strength for my growth. You do more, O God, than nourish me. You give me shape, form, and purpose. Thank you, O God, for the many ways you give me life. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

How does God sustain you? How might you sustain others?

Thoughts and Notes From the Week

LIVING A LEGACY OF LOVE



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Theological Declaration of Barmen

Why Creeds?

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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:

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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!

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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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The Creeds of the Church
Lent 2023, Week 4

The Confession of 1967

Why Creeds?

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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?

WE
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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?

WE
Believe

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?

WE
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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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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
HASTINGS, NEBRASKA

First Presbyterian Church



A Brief Statement of Faith

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.

A Brief Statment of Faith - Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Stop me if you've heard this one before, but in 1983, two Presbyterian denominations merged and decided that they should have a new statement of faith for their new denomination. As a result, in 1984, a committee was appointed that began the process of creating what would become A Brief Statement of Faith, a document that was officially adopted at the 203rd General Assembly in 1991.

A Brief Statement of Faith draws from scriptural witness as well as previous creeds and confessions of the church in its attempt to point to beliefs that form the core of the church's faith. If you'll recall, the authors of the Scots Confession invited anyone who had questions about their statements to write to them and ask for an explanation. The writers of A Brief Statement of Faith included their citations so that anyone could follow their reasoning.

In terms of structure, the statement follows the trinitarian formula found in 2 Corinthians 13:14 with sections first on Jesus the Christ, then God, and then the Holy Spirit. A Brief Statement also touches on many of the foundational aspects of reformed theology, including the sovereignty of God, the form and shape of human sin, the importance of Scripture, the role of the sacraments, the purpose of the Church, and the call of faith for believers.

A Brief Statement of Faith was intended, at least in part, to be an umbrella under which many people could find shelter. Its brevity—it is only 80 lines long—points towards and restates fundamental aspects of reformed theology while also allowing room for interpretation and application. Its brevity also allows for it to be easily used as a teaching tool or adapted as a worship resource, which is how it is often used in Presbyterian Churches today.

The Creed

I will admit, they did manage to create a statement of faith that is actually brief. However, due to its poetic structure, it is still too long to be reproduced here. If you'd like, you can find a full version here.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/brief-statement-of-faith/>

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!

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Romans 8:26-39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Monday, March 27

“In life and in death we belong to God.

*Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve”*

A Brief Statement, Lines 1-6 (reformatted)

I do not belong to my things. I do not belong to my schedule. I do not belong to my list. I belong to You. I do not belong to my team. I do not belong to my company. I do not belong to advertisers. I belong to You. I do not belong to my broken relationships. I do not belong to my shattered dreams. I do not belong to my grief. I belong to You. I do not belong to my anxiety. I do not belong to my fear. I do not belong to anyone else's assumptions of me. I belong to You, the Holy One of Israel, the mother who will not forsake her nursing child, the father who runs to welcome the prodigal. I belong to You. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What freedom do you receive from belonging to God and to nothing else?

Tuesday, March 28

“Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

*preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed and blessing the children,
healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.”*

A Brief Statement, Lines 9-18 (reformatted)

Look at all those action words, verbs I guess they're called: to preach, to teach, to bless, to heal, and to bind up. That's a full day right there. Add in eating and forgiving? Well, that's a full lifetime. To follow in such ways, to embrace the pathways of Jesus, would never leave us without something to do, some spot in the world where we could ply our trade. Help us, O God, to make these actions our own actions. Nurture and challenge us so that our days may be just as full as those of Jesus. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What actions will describe your day? What verbs will describe your life?

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Wednesday, March 29

*"In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community."*

A Brief Statement of Faith, Lines 29-32

A love that has no limits, such is the love you, O God, have for the world. My love, on the other hand, seems to be limited. If I'm running late, I'm much less loving. Being tired or hungry seems to limit the reach of my love. My love is governed by how I was raised and what I watch and what I always thought was true. Your love calls for a world where all are welcomed and held in equal esteem. I believe in such a place. But help my unbelief as well. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What limits your love for others? What has expanded it over the years?

Thursday, March 30

*"The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church."*

A Brief Statement of Faith, Lines 58-64

I thank you, O God, for the touchstones and guideposts you give your followers along the way, for communion that draws us to your table of mercy, for baptism that marks us with your grace, for the Bible that illumines our lives, for preaching that nurtures and challenges our faith, for a community that helps us through our lives. Thank you, O God, for all your means of salvation. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

How has the Holy Spirit shown you the faith?

Friday, March 31

*"In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, 'Come, Lord Jesus!'"*

A Brief Statement of Faith, Lines 72-76

Empower us, O God. When your words catch in our throats, give us your breath to speak them. When our feet hesitate along your path, give us your haste to move them. When our hearts respond too slowly to the pain of others, grant that your compassion may quicken them. Build us. Equip us. Send us into the world to lives that are holy and joyful. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Where are you in need of God's empowerment?

Saturday, April 1

*"With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

A Brief Statement of Faith, Lines 77-79

We do not belong to our things. We do not belong to our schedules. We do not belong to our lists. We belong to You. We do not belong to our squabbles. We do not belong to our alignments. We do not belong to our agendas. We belong to You. We do not belong to my broken relationships. We do not belong to our shattered dreams. We do not belong to our grief. We belong to You. We belong to the Christ who redeemed us. We belong to the Spirit that guides us. We belong to one another. Thanks be to You. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day?

What seeks to separate us from God? What seeks to separate us from one another?

*WE
Believe*

Thoughts and Notes From the Week

Holy Week

Maundy Thursday - April 6 at 7 p.m.

Honoring the Last Supper - Sanctuary

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An Affirmation of Faith

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.

An Affirmation of Faith - First Presbyterian Confirmation Class of 2019

Anyone can write a creed or a statement of faith or a whatever you want to call it. In fact, many theologians would argue that the manner in which we live our lives composes a new statement of faith each day. Perhaps you are familiar with the folk wisdom that insists that if you want to know what a person believes, you ought to watch their feet.

In 2019 the confirmation class of Shannon Rene Canady, Jackson Graves, Eleanor Oliver, Campbell Schukei, and Claire Schwarz wrote a collective affirmation of faith. They were aided in this process by their teachers, Dave Cooke and Neil Riley. The affirmation that they created certainly adheres to and upholds core tenets of reformed theology. It is formatted on a trinitarian structure, upholds the fully human and fully divine nature of Jesus, asserts a belief in the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, and outlines the calling and mission of the Church.

Their affirmation also places an emphasis on the relational nature of the divine. God is described as a creator who listens and comforts, both very relational terms. God is also forgiving and merciful, which in turn inspires humans to love and serve all living beings.

This relational emphasis spills over in their understanding of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is a savior who also teaches and wants people to be in relationship with him via discipleship. The Holy Spirit is understood to be a facilitator of relationships who connects people to God and also to one another.

Even the Church is understood through a relational lens as it is described as a community and gathering place that helps people, teaches about God, and cares for those outside of its walls.

Anyone can write a creed. Maybe you should try it as well!

The Creed

We believe God is the creator of heaven and earth. God listens to our prayers and comforts us. We believe he is merciful and forgiving toward all humans. He helps us to love all living beings and to serve him faithfully. We believe that God has a plan for each of us, even if we don't fully understand what it is.

We believe that Jesus is the Son of God and is fully human and fully God. He is our savior, who died on the cross to forgive our sins. We believe that Jesus is the human form of God, who taught people about God while he was on earth. He wants us to be his disciples.

We believe the Holy Spirit is part of God within us. The Holy Spirit helps us communicate with God and connects us all. We believe the Holy Spirit is the part of us that will live forever, if we have faith in God and Jesus.

We believe the Church is a community of hope. The Church is a safe gathering place. We believe the Church helps people in need, teaches people about God, and cares for people in the community.

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.

Matthew 21:6-11

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Monday, April 3

Gracious God, grant me your immanence. Grant me your presence. Give unto me the sure and comforting knowledge that you are with me, that you hear me, that you know me, that I am not alone. Draw me once more into a fellowship of shared burdens and mutual joys, a community shaped and formed by your Spirit, which gives hope to the hopeless and light to the lost. Come, O God. Enter my life. Shield, guide, and nurture me. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

When do you know God’s presence? Who shares your burdens and joys?

Tuesday, April 4

The crowds stretched out their cloaks and went looking for branches to prepare a way for Jesus. May we also prepare such a way in our lives. Help us, O God, to open ourselves to your presence. Help us to clear the fear and hesitation that keeps us from truly welcoming you and our neighbors. Give us the audacity to shout out the arrival of the things that we believe. Let us prepare to welcome you into our hearts once more. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

How can you prepare your heart to welcome God?

Wednesday, April 5

In the distance, O God, I can see the darkening skies. The shouts of the crowd have faded. A new, more furious, rumor is growing in its edge and volume. Soon the joy of the palms will give way to the sorrow of the cross. Soon that which seemed so promising will be gone. Dreams are dashed. Hope fades. Joy recedes and is replaced by mourning. Help me, O God, in the days to come to hold to the hope. Help me, Gracious Lord, in the moments of my own despair, to trust in you. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What hope has faded? What hope is growing?

Thursday, April 6

How remarkable, O God, that the one who was fully human and fully divine came not to be served but to serve, not to be loved but to love, not to be lifted but to uplift others. Of all that he taught and of all that he said, let us cling most firmly to this: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Help us, O God, to keep this commandment. Strengthen us. Encourage us. Enable us to be not only hearers of these words but doers as well. Give us that which we need to be loving disciples of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What acts of love have you received? What acts of love have you offered?

WE
Believe

Friday, April 7

The world is still full of places of destruction and despair. These are places where the cross is still known, where the cross is still used. The cross of starvation. The cross of homelessness. The crosses of war and abandonment. The cross of disease. The cross of pollution. The cross of abuse, prejudice, violence and mistrust. If we are people of faith, then we cannot ignore the cross. We must bear witness to the suffering, the pain, and the anguish of our neighbors. But help us, O God, not only to see the crosses of the world but also to work at taking them down. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

Where do you see pain and suffering in the world? What would relieve that anguish?

Saturday, April 8

I believe, O God, that the Church is a thing of hope. I believe that it calls me to faith in the face of desolation, renewal in the midst of expiration, and love in the shadow of hate. I believe, O God, that this is a day of hope. Though the shadow of the cross lingers, I hear Jesus say, "There is yet more." Though the stone and the grave loom, I feel the Spirit insist, "This is not the end." Though the world seems so full of violence and mistrust and fear mongering, I know you declare, "Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Thank you, O God, for hope in the silence. Amen.

Contemplative question(s) for the day

What is your Easter hope?

Thoughts and Notes From the Week

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