



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

"We believe..."

By The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

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Every Sunday, we all stand together and recite the Nicene Creed. It is a very old document that outlines the basic things that Christians claim. There were many creeds developed during the early centuries of the church. As the Christian faith spread throughout the world, there were different explanations and interpretations of many things, particularly Jesus. In some of the letters of Paul, he makes reference to those who came "teaching another Christ." He appealed to his flock to disregard them and to remember what he had taught about Christ. Then there was the outside culture who did not understand many of the things that they had heard. Things like, eating the body of Christ – charges of cannibalism were made as well as magic and subversion. Eventually it was determined that a clear statement of what Christians believed was necessary. The Apostles Creed is the earliest known and the legend is that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to each speak one of the twelve statements in it.

The Nicene Creed, which we all know well, is the result of a two great church conventions, in one in Nicea in 325 and the second in Constantinople some 50 years later. Both of these councils were dealing with ways of thinking about Jesus – some claimed that he was not really human, only appeared to be. Others said that he was a creature of God and therefore, there was a time before he existed. There were many other claims. The various councils of the church determined the official position and came up with language that meant a great deal to them but not so much to us today; "eternally begotten of the father," "begotten not made, of one Being with the Father," "ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." We believe...

In my last church, this was a problem, in fact in many churches in the Diocese of Los Angeles, people were struggling with the idea that they were professing belief in things of which they weren't terribly sure. I lost a member of my congregation because of it. Others would stand but declined to join in. Honestly, I don't know how you all feel about it; it's not been a hot topic around here. So I don't know if it is meaningful to you, or just something that you say without much thought, or with your fingers crossed. What to think?

A very good place to start to get a handle on the creed, is to understand the Latin word *credamus*. We translate it as "we believe." Unfortunately, our understanding of belief in our time tends get turned into, "we accept as factual." We hear, "we believe" and think that we are

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saying, “we claim that these things are facts or that they happened this way.” We are wrong in that especially when we overlook that we are saying “we believe *in*...” In the Latin, the verb *credere* means to “trust in” or “to give trust to.” Marcus Borg, that wonderful Episcopal theologian, says that *credere* – to believe *in* something – happens in the heart, not in the head. It is the difference between saying to someone that you think that they are telling the truth versus telling them that you believe in them. Can you hear the difference? When you believe in someone, you are in relationship with them and you are committing a part of yourself to them.

So not only are we hearing the word “believe” wrong, we are then reciting a lot of formulas that are frankly not so important in our time. On top of that, there is a problem with the creed, it has a hole in it. When it talks about Jesus, it mentions the miraculous birth, skips to the crucifixion, and resurrection, with nothing about what he taught and did during his life. We make no statement about how he inspired people, brought them to new life, healed them and loved them. I would hope that if we were to write a creed today, some of those things would be important enough to be included.

This is exactly what our young people here have done as a part of their journey towards confirmation. Since coming together, these 8 great kids have been thinking long and hard about what they believe, not just what they have been told to believe – what a concept! They were asked to think about what qualities they discern in God, and what Christ stands for, who Jesus was and is, how they imagine the holy Spirit, and what they think about the church. And then they were set free from all of the old ways of describing those things and asked to liberate their inner poet. They were asked to proclaim what they believe from their hearts. What they came up with, this group writing effort, is nothing short of fabulous.

We believe in The Trinity.

We imagine that God is

*A light that guides us in a dark world;
the mason of humankind whose hands
give us strength and compassion.*

We see Jesus as

*A messenger of peace, hope and love
who was sacrificed for us.
It is with deep, mixed emotions that we
celebrate his life and
remember his cruel death.*

We feel the Holy Spirit as

*A mystifying presence of solid, liquid
and gas that glows
and sparkles in our soul.*

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We are comforted

*In a spiritual home that provides us a safe
space with the freedom to inquire, pray
and explore our faith.*

We desire

*A world where everything
and anything is possible.*

We know that

One day, out of many, we will be one.

They are Trinity kids and proud of it, so they start right there. And then in their post-modern, 21st century, Millennial Generation way, they see God, as a mysterious, illuminating presence and invoke God's power to guide us. Could you say that you believe in that God?

They are much more concrete about Jesus, less concerned about his origins than with what he meant. A messenger of hope and peace and love and that somehow, his death was for us. They allude to the appropriate range of emotions drawn forth from such a life and death. The fact that they speak of him in the present tense – "we see him as" give us the freedom contemplate Jesus' continuing life, evoking the resurrection without even mentioning it. How modern and creative of them.

In speaking of the Holy Spirit, they really stepped up the plate, acknowledging the mystery that fills all of God's creation – solid, liquid and gas, the seen and unseen. I like the part where the Holy Spirit glows and sparkles in my soul. Those words evoke imagination and creativity – good things for us all to accept as something to be found in us.

And who knew that these random teenagers who came together and were forced to start thinking and talking about the church, would turn into a group that now describes it as a place of comfort, freedom and discovery. I am humbled.

The next statement is intriguing in its ambiguity – are they still speaking of the church or is this something grander still? Have they woven a prayer into their creed, identifying what is not yet here but for which they hope. The use the word *desire* is powerful because it is brings with it passion and urgency. In this desire, I hear mission.

And all good creeds must look ahead. In the Trinity Kids Creed, they look ahead to the time when Christ's work is done, all divisions overcome and they don't anticipate how it will happen; they just know it will.

Now, lest you think that I had something to do with the writing of this, please don't sell them short. I was out of town, this is their work. This is the work of the Holy Spirit through them. But their creed, their statement of belief, resonates in my heart, there is a relieved kind of soul sigh when it is put this way, a big "yes!"

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I invite all of you to consider what you would say should you be asked to define your Christian faith. What words would you use, what would you include or omit. What is important? What do you believe?

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