

We Are Not Alone

The "new" Creed was written and adopted by the General Council in 1968. Now, I know we are in 2022 and to call something "new" that is 54 years old is rather silly. EXCEPT the Nicene Creed which was adopted at the Council of Nicea in 325, making it 1,697 years old. In comparison, the Apostles Creed was written about the same time, but was not adopted as an official statement of faith until about 125 years after the Nicene Creed. So in the grand scheme of things, 54 years for a Creed is infancy.

Why am I preaching this today?

To be honest, I have struggled with the language of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds for some time. The masculine language is problematic. We do not have proof that God is gendered. I believe God to be larger than gender. God is simply God, God is simply love.

The language is problematic when it comes to substitutionary atonement, which is the belief that Jesus died for me and instead of me.

Substitutionary atonement, also called vicarious atonement, is the idea that Jesus died "for us". There is also a less technical use of the term "substitution" in discussion about atonement when it is used in "the sense that [Jesus, through his death,] did for us that which we can never do for ourselves" www.wikipedia.com

Language evolves. Words evolve. We do not speak the same way we did in Jesus' time or in Shakespeare's time. There is much to be said about the way in which our beliefs evolve. When I was little I believed that the stars were always the same in the sky. As an adult I know that is absolutely untrue, yet it brought great comfort to me as a child because I could always find the star on which my Uncle Ernie and the star on which my Nana could see me.

I don't like how Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the Nicene and Apostles' Creed "for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate" which insinuates that Pilate chose to crucify Jesus to spare humanity. Not at all.

Pontius Pilate represented Rome and when the Creeds were written the world continued to be under Roman control. The world is no longer under Roman control. And when I read Matthew's Gospel, it paints a picture of Pilate as afraid of the mob, afraid of the crowd and physically washes his hands before the sentencing to show the crowd that he is not in favour of putting Jesus to death, but does it because he feels he has no choice.

All of that aside, whether you believe fully in the Apostles Creed and in the Nicene Creed, the language is quite layered and complicated.

The Church has changed a lot in our lifetime. It has changed most significantly since the 25th of January 2020, when the first presumed case of COVID-19 arrived in Canada. Within a couple of months, the Churches and schools were closed. The streets were bare, highways empty. Everyone went inside and stayed there for nearly two years. For some, we are still inside.

There was a time when the Creeds were central to my faith. When I lived and breathed the 39 Articles of Faith. When the Creed of St. Athanasius resonate strongly with me.

And then COVID happened and suddenly, the liturgical colours and using the proper prefaces didn't seem significant at all. What came more clearly into focus was the necessity of finding safe and meaningful worship. In the darkest and most frightening times this Parish made the decision to be together, online and eventually blended with both online and in person worship.

The first time I read "The New Creed" which I have renamed "Our Creed" it spoke very strongly to me. In simple yet profound language.

"We are not alone, we live in God's world."

This is most excellent and comforting news. We don't have to worry about how we navigate the world in which we live because we don't have to do it alone. God is with us (always).

"We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit".

That's the triune God we worship, God, Jesus and Spirit.
Who has created and is creating – the world is evolving and has been from the very beginning,

"Who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh" – Jesus is fully divine and fully human. He is God in the flesh on earth.

"To reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit" – we reconcile our behaviour and our lives through Jesus in whom we trust and in the Holy Spirit, who has been with us from the very beginning.

"We trust in God". – I mean, we have to if we want to truly believe, don't we?

"We are called to be the Church:" – this is setting up those things which we universally believe about "Church" as a whole.

"to celebrate God's presence" – We seek to know God and to enter into deeper relationships with God.

"to live with respect in Creation", – we are called to be faithful stewards of creation which we do annually with the Season of Creation, as well as making responsible choices in how we live on this earth.

"to love and serve others" – These are loving words, and yet difficult to fully live. We are called to love one another, not to necessarily like one another. AND we are called to serve others. In a world that is increasingly singular and where the belief seems to be that the individual is more important than the collective this is difficult to teach, yet imperative to live.

"to seek justice and resist evil" – These should be common sense words, yet how do we define justice and how do we define evil? To seek justice means to play fair, to tell the truth, to speak up for those whose voices are not heard.

Resisting evil is much more than refusing a second helping of cake. It is remembering the petition before, 'to love and serve others', which means not taking advantage of the weak or the sick. It means taking risks in trusting what your heart and gut tell you. It means often taking the road less travelled and not taking the easy way out.

"to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen" – It's not enough to know Jesus, although that is important – we also need to talk about Jesus, to share our faith story and to see others out and ask for their faith story. I don't mean their testimony, I mean the deep abiding love and respect we have for Jesus as our brother. Crucified and risen is a bit tricky because we know that Jesus died, we know he was crucified, and we believe he has risen. We also believe that one day we will see Jesus again.

"our judge and our hope" – I am thankful that the role of judge is not left up to me because I know I would not do a good job. And I am especially thankful that judgement is also balanced with hope. We strive to always do our best. We may not always succeed and we pray that Jesus' judgement will be merciful and just. We know that through Jesus we see love and we learn hope.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone" – through this life, into the next life and beyond we will always have God with us because, as we have been promised, we are not alone.

"Thanks be to God". – Indeed. Thanks be to God.

We have been in this Shared Ministry gig for three years. Our Shared Ministry Anniversary is the first of September. We started on this roller coaster together in 2019, and just as we were figuring things out, COVID arrived.

We showed our metal during that time. We could have closed up shop, locked the doors, and hid away. Yet instead we chose to connect the best way we could. For the majority that meant learning a new program called Zoom. For some that meant receiving letters and deliveries to your doors to let you know what we were up to and how we were still connected to and praying for one another. It was lighting a candle each week, both in person, at home and in our beloved buildings.

A lot has changed in that time. Knox United made the brave decision to be a responsible steward of creation and imagine that the historic building on 2nd Avenue could be resurrected as something new. Conversation continues towards that dream becoming a reality...watch this space.

And then what happens? Do we continue with Worship as it now is? With first and third Sundays at Knox and second and fourth Sundays at Christ Church?

What if the decision was made for us all to worship together every week at Christ Church? What do we need to do to make Knox feel like an equal partner in the relationship, rather than a favourite guest?

Do we change the sanctuary?

Do we change the sign outside?

Do we dare to rename the Parish?

To be clear NONE of this has been decided. Everything is up for discussion. And we need people from both Churches to be part of the conversation. Imagine you were getting married and decided to move into your spouse's house. You would want that space to be reflective of both of you, correct?

It should reflect your individual taste and your collective style, correct?

It should give you a sense of history and a peek to the future, correct?

It should focus on that which you have in common, moreso than that which divides and separates you, correct?

All of this will take time. And it will take intentional listening. It won't happen overnight and I suspect there will be many tweaks and changes as we move along, the same as there is in any important relationship.

Think, for a moment, of your own faith journey.

Have you always been the same denomination? i.e. Anglican, United, Lutheran, etc.?

Have you always worshipped in the same way?

Have you always worshipped at the same time?

Has your faith changed since you were a child?

Has your faith changed since you moved to the Elk Valley?

Has your faith changed since you became a parent or grandparent?

Has your faith changed since someone significant to you died i.e. parent, sibling, spouse, or child?

Has your faith changed as you age?

These are deeply personal questions that only you can answer, each for yourself. And no, this is not a test. And I highly doubt this will become a questionnaire.

Ask yourself what you miss about weekly worship in your own building.

Ask yourself what you have been surprised by in worshipping in a building that is not yours.

Ask yourself what you lament about the church from 25 years ago, ten years ago, five years ago, and 2 ½ years ago.

Ask yourself what the best surprise is since we began Shared Ministry.

Ask yourself what do you want the future to hold?

Dare to dream about the future church.

There was a bleak forecast about the Church published in the Anglican Journal by our National Statistician who also happens to be the Regional Dean of the West Kootenays. In that article, published prior to COVID, the data supported that the Church, in its current state, would cease to be by 2040.

“We've got simple projections from our data that suggest that there will be no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040,” (Rev'd Canon Neil Elliot to the Anglican Journal 9 November 2019.)

Richard Bott, former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, stated in a Message to the faithful, reflecting on 97 years of Union in the United Church of Canada. In it he stated that ever since Union, which happened on the 10th of June 1025, the Church has been in decline. The Church is changing and needs to continue changing to meet the needs of those who are seeking.

He stated further that he did not fear the change, and he did not lament that the Church continues to shrink, because, as Easter people, we believe in resurrection! We believe in making things new again and again.

Fernie Knox United Church is not the same as it was when it first opened its doors in Fernie over 100 years ago.

Christ Church Anglican is not the same as it was when it first opened its doors in Fernie over 100 years ago.

Both buildings have been built and rebuilt. Both have been renovated. Both have seen a plethora of ministers and musicians come and go. Both have seen their congregations change over the years with funerals for matriarchs and patriarchs. The baptisms of babies and grand-babies. The marriages of generations of Fernie-ites in our beloved sacred spaces.

And as wonderful as that was, and continues to be, it has and will continue to change.

We have choices to make. We can lament and moan and carry on about "the good old days" or we can give thanks for what we have learned from the past and take those lessons to the future.

We are not who we were in 1900.
We are not who we were in 1925.
We are not who we were in 1945.
We are not who we were in 1969.
We are not who we were in 1991.
We are not who we were in 2000.
We are not who we were in 2016.
We are not who we were in 2020.

We are not who we will be in 2025. Or 2027. Or 2040.

We have many decisions to make and many roads to walk.

There will be days of sunshine and days of rain.
Days of snow and days of such beauty, it takes our breath away.

And we must remember, more than anything else, that we have each other.
And we have God. We are not alone.

Thanks be to God!

Amen

Sermon for 31 July - Pentecost 8
Fifth Sunday Outdoor Worship
"We Are Not Alone" - The New Creed