

Stating Our Faith
September 6, 2015
Colossians 1:15-20 (The Inclusive Bible)

Now that we are several weeks into our series on “Speaking Christian,” we are beginning to develop a shared vocabulary. Last week when we focused on “Bible” I mentioned the many views people have of it, but did not mention the many genres of literature within it. When reading any biblical text it helps to know what kind of literature it is: an epistle (or letter), history, law, prophecy, or poetry.

This morning’s reading from the first chapter of Colossians is poetry. Most scholars think it was originally an early Christian hymn.

As I read it, I invite you to engage your creative side. Imagine yourself learning about Jesus by hearing and later saying or singing these unfamiliar words – words that although new to you are well known by others in your worshipping community.

Christ is the image of the unseen God and the firstborn of all creation, for in Christ were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and invisible, Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers – all things were created through Christ and for Christ.

Before anything was created, Christ existed, and all things hold together in Christ. The church is the body; Christ is its head. Christ is the Beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and so Christ is first in every way.

God wanted all perfection to be found in Christ, and all things to be reconciled to God through Christ – everything in heaven and on earth – when Christ made peace by dying on the cross.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these wise words, and let us pray. Creator and Creating God, create in us receptive hearts and open minds that we might take our faith seriously and know Jesus personally. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

As a resident of Southwest Florida for the last several years, I have been blessed to expand my horizons in many ways – including learning from many of you about what everyday life was like before I was born. I understand many of you grew up in a time I will “BT” – Before Television. In the world before every home had a television and every television had the ability to receive dozens of channels, there was radio.

Perhaps you can remember gathering around the radio to listen to your favorite programs . . . I wonder if any of you ever remember listening to Edward R. Murrow’s program, “This I Believe” back in the 1950s.

This brief nightly feature presented “the personal philosophies of thoughtful men and women in all walks of life.”¹ These five minute inspirational talks by famous people and people the audience had never heard of before were void of “pat answers for the problems of life.” Instead, they contained refreshingly real, amazingly authentic, and particularly personal accounts of what people believed and how their personal philosophies gave meaning to their lives.

More than 50 years after the original series, I was introduced to “This I Believe” when I was asked to write reviews of two books of essays bearing the same name.² These books contained some of the original essays from the 1950s alongside contemporary statements of belief from the 2000s.³ The new essays were also originally aired on the radio via NPR.⁴

Think about how short five minutes really is . . . now picture yourself trying to write an essay that tells the world what you believe. Don’t forget to consider the editing required to ensure your expression can be shared orally in five minutes or less.

For centuries the church has attempted to simplify this exercise. The two most commonly stated creeds in all of Christianity – the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed – can be read aloud in less than five minutes. While neither is likely a statement any of you have adopted

¹ Edward R. Murrow’s original introduction to “This I Believe” from the 1950s. <<https://youtu.be/FMNw7M-eUdU>>

² Greg Smith “Review of This I Believe and This I Believe II.”

<<http://sowhatfaith.com/2009/11/13/review-of-this-i-believe-and-this-i-believe-ii/>>

³ “About This I Believe” <<http://thisibelieve.org/about/>>

⁴ “The History of This I Believe” <<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/about.html#>>

as your personal life philosophy both contain elements of what has long been understood as the historic Christian faith.

In our midst, however, are many followers of the Way of Jesus who are not comfortable reciting either. While some elements from both creeds may resonate, for a number of people the language and theology does not. Since our tradition is not creedal, we do not require anyone to say much less believe those or other Christian creeds.

And yet, we value belief. In fact, we value it so much we try to nurture belief in everyone.

Over the years I have taught many confirmation classes. At its worst, confirmation serves as a means to indoctrinate children into the beliefs of their parents and/or the beliefs of their parents' church. At its best, confirmation invites young people to explore countless options and arrive at their own unique blend of beliefs that fit them well at that stage on their journey.

Several of the confirmation programs I have overseen required students to write a statement of faith and to share that statement with the entire congregation. While we often encouraged creativity most students opted to write then read an essay. And, while the content varied considerably all were delivered in five minutes or less.

I wonder . . . What do you believe?

A month ago I challenged you to think about the meaning of Communion, and to express in 100 words or less why it is that you take Communion. This morning, on an insert, you will find five answers to that question. As we prepare to come to the Table, I hope you will read those remarks as you continue to formulate your answer.

I wonder . . . What do you believe?

Earlier this week I challenged the group who gathered for Topical Tuesday to write a statement of faith. During that single session the group was tasked with writing about who God is and what the church is called to be. They were told to write only words that every member present could agree upon. As we prepare to come to the Table, I hope

you will read those remarks aloud with me and consider how they align with your theology.

I wonder . . . What do you believe?

Edward R. Murrow's answer to that very question should both unsettle and reassure us as we try crafting our own:

This reporter's beliefs are in a state of flux. It would be easier to enumerate the items I do not believe in than the other way around.⁵

Friends, it is my hope that this community of faith is and continues to be a place where all are free to state their faith and where together we work to discern and state our shared faith.

I wonder . . . What do we believe?

Amen.

⁵ Murrow.