

The Nicene Creed (A Reading) – UMH #880

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 one 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.

**universal*

Scripture Lesson: Colossians 2:6-10

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 189

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Colossians 2:6-10

08/17/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

The Nicene Creed, Week 2: “In Accordance with the Scriptures”

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If asked, most of you would probably define an Easter Egg as a tasty treat enjoyed at Eastertime – hard-boiled eggs decorated with bright colors and assorted designs. But in recent years, it’s come to my attention that Easter Eggs are also hidden messages inserted in movies and video games to entertain hardcore followers of these various media. For example, Steven Spielberg included an Easter Egg in his very first Indiana Jones movie in order to pay tribute to George Lucas, who had helped him get the project off the ground. A careful observer will notice a carving of C3PO and R2D2 in the stone wall in the cave where the Lost Ark is discovered. Lucas returned the favor in the Star Wars Prequel *The*

Phantom Menace, where we see several of Spielberg's ET characters in a floating pod at the imperial senate. JJ Abrams did the same thing, including R2D2 as a piece of floating space junk in the 2009 remake of *Star Trek*. Disney is famous for their Easter Eggs. In *Frozen*, we find a Mickey Mouse among Anna's possessions, in *Moana*, we see Aladin's lamp in Maui's pile of gold; in *Aladin*, Sabastin the Crab from *The Little Mermaid* makes a cameo appearance; the Sleeping Beauty's infamous sewing wheel is tucked in a corner of Rapunzel's tower, and in *the Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* can be seen passing through the crowd with a nose in her book. And diligent Harry Potter fans noticed that old Newt Scamander seemed to be visiting Hogwarts in the middle of Harry's third year because he shows up right there on the Marauder's map.

Michael Carpenter, in his book *We Believe*, rightly points out that scripture may be the original inventor of this kind of Easter Egg. The trained eye, the devout searcher, the hardcore follower will discover in the words and pages of scripture a rich tapestry of images and teaching that help us understand God's purpose and plans, or at least, the broad and general scope, even if specifics aren't offered.

I entitled this Sermon "In Accordance with the Scripture" – a phrase used in the Nicene Creed that comes directly from the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul, in talking about resurrection, writes: Now I want you to understand, brothers and sisters, the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved... ³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ⁴ and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter and the twelve..." In that chapter, Paul goes on to lambast the Corinthians for questioning the truth of the resurrection, pointing out to them that if Christ didn't die and wasn't raised from the dead, then all our hope and all our faith is futile.

The Nicene Creed makes much the same point. If you look at the Nicene Creed, you'll find there 40 distinct phrases. 5 have to do with God the Father, 5 with the nature of the church, 8 with the Holy Spirit, but a full 22 phrases – more than half – speak to the nature and being of Jesus Christ. We talked last week about the first nine of those phrases. This week, we look at the other 13, which begins with the phrase "for us and for our salvation". That's the point, the purpose, the reason for all the Jesus does. This is where the creed suddenly gets very personal – for us and for our salvation. Scripture is one long story of redemption and salvation. As soon as humankind is created in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we fall into sin, and ever since then, God has acted on behalf of humankind. Across 66 books and nearly 1200 chapters, scripture tells the story of God's redemptive work in human life. And throughout scripture, we find, over and over again, Easter Eggs of truth. In Genesis 22, Abraham prepares to offer up Isaac on the 3rd day, only to find a substitute for the sacrifice at the last moment. Jonah spends 3 days and nights in the belly of the whale, and Jesus tells his followers that they sign of Jonah is the only sign they'll get (Matthew 12:39-40). Isaiah refers both to a child being born for us who will be wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9), and also to the suffering servant who was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole..." (Isaiah 53). Time and again, scripture offers a base for how God will work salvation for his people.

For us and for our salvation, Jesus came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. This follows the scriptural record put forward in the first chapter of Matthew and the second chapter of Luke. We read those lessons every year at Christmas time. Interestingly, the creed spends very little time on the teachings, healings, and events of Jesus' earthly life. Not because they don't matter, but because they don't seem to be controversial. Instead, it

reiterates again that it was “for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures...” Again, this is clearly recorded in the scriptures.

But let me share what Michael Carpenter writes about these lines: “It is worth dwelling a moment on Pilate’s inclusion in the creed. In the entire Nicene Creed, there are only two humans mentioned. They are Mary and Pilate. Mary caused Jesus’ life to begin; Pilate caused it to end. Mary hears the angels’ announcement and believes; Pilate hears Jesus himself and wonders, “what is truth?” Mary says “let it be with me according to your word”; Pilate washes his hands of it all. Mary is the archetype for faithfulness to God’s plan; Pilate is the archetype for faithlessness. And yet, Pilate is used all the same, finding himself remembered forever for his role in our salvation.” [from “We Believe: How the Nicene Creed Can Deepen Your Faith” by Michael Carpenter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2025) pg. 51.]. These two foil one another, showing us through the scriptural record how Christ’s incarnation at birth and his death by crucifixion serve to further our salvation.

But there’s another vital piece we must explore. We talked last week about how the Nicene Creed heaps phrase upon phrase to drive home the divinity of Jesus Christ. He is fully God.

But he is also fully human. At the same time that Arius was fighting Bishop Alexander claiming Jesus could not possibly share the divine nature of God, others such as Marcion of Sinope, Valentinus, and Basilides came from the opposite side, saying that Jesus was not really human, but only appeared to be human. They had no problem accepting the divinity of Christ. Rather, they argued that Jesus’ humanity was just a mirage, an illusion, something the divine could easily conjure. After all, no God would possibly breastfeed or soil diapers or go through puberty. No God would practice carpentry or walk dusty roads teaching the riffraff or touch lepers and heal them. And above all, no God would actually die a human death, particularly not one so gruesome and torturous as Roman crucifixion. So, God must have come to us in some kind of seemingly human form, not to maliciously trick us, of course, but to get as close as the divine reasonably can. This philosophy is a heresy called Docetism.

A word about heresy. For obvious reasons, heresies are looked on in very poor light, and historically, heretics often suffered all sorts of torture and abuse at the hands of other Christians. Heretical teaching should, by all means, be called out when we see it. But the truth is that many times, heretics were devout believers and followers of God who wound up on the losing side of a theological argument, and more often than not, the cry of heresy was used more as a means of cementing power and position than genuine concern for people. In recent years, I’ve heard those on both the Christian left and the Christian right lob the term heresy at one another without definition or discretion. The charges are not wholly without academic credibility, but what does it say about the Church when followers of Jesus become preoccupied more with correct doctrine than living love and compassion for the least of these among us? Feed first. Welcome first. Love first. Then teach. That’s how Jesus does it over and over again in accordance with the scriptures.

When I was growing up, I remember my Sunday school teachers telling me how Jesus was the bridge between us and God. When I teach confirmation these days, I still tell my students that Jesus is the bridge between us and God. Because he is fully divine and fully human, he does what every good bridge builder does – he builds from both sides and meets in the middle. This is what Jesus does. He is not 50% God and 50% human. He is 100% of both. Mathematically, some of us may struggle with that a little, but thankfully, our salvation isn’t based on mathematics. It’s rooted in the intersection of Christ’s full humanity and full divinity. In the fullness of time, Jesus was born. He died, was buried, rose again, and appeared to many before ascending into heaven. Remember, heaven isn’t a geographical location. It’s the place where God’s will is fully realized. Jesus serves in that state, at God’s side, as our advocate and intercessor. He hears the prayers we utter in our hearts. He knows the

pain and suffering we experience. He feels the thrill of our growth in faith. And he loves us beyond all measure.

Now the last part of this section is tricky. It reminds us that Christ will return, Christ will judge, and Christ's Kingdom will finally be established among us. Most people, when they read that, they get uncomfortable, particularly with the judging part. So let me just say this: the good news for all of us is that the one doing the judging is the one who knit our inward parts together in our mother's womb – the one who sees our hearts, knows our minds, infuses our souls. Scripture tells us that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Certainly, our faith puts obligations on us – on the way we should live, the choices we make, the money we spend, the relationships we cultivate. And none of us live up to the calling of Christ upon us. We all fall short of the glory of God. We are all sinners dependent upon God's grace. Thankfully, it is the one who secures that grace who does the judging. If you're anything like me, you've done your share of judging, even if you keep it to yourself. Someday, that old so-and-so is gonna have to face Jesus and get what's coming to him! Ha Ha Ha! Which is all very comforting if they don't seem to face any justice now. But then I must consider the reality that someday I'll face Jesus and have to answer for my life. And I know I'm going to do some squirming under the scrutiny of his divine light, but I remain thankful that it's not my bishop or my district superintendent or my parents or my kids or my congregation or my second cousin twice removed that will judge me in the end. No! In the end, this Holy One who meets me when I bow in prayer, when I read the scripture, when I encounter the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, the hurting, the suffering, the sick, the dying, the struggling, and the marginalized is the same one who will ultimately judge, and in that, I take heart. Because he knows me inside out. And I know him well enough to know that I can trust both his judgement and his grace.

In reference to that line, people also sometimes get a little uncomfortable with the whole promise of Christ's return and establishment of a Kingdom with no end. But scripture is very clear that the world as it is, is not the way it will always be, and this, too, is really good news for us. In fact, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is already here.

Eta Carinae is a massive, unstable binary star system located approximately 8000 light-years away in the constellation Carina. Scientists think the star is at the end of its life, and they expect it to explode into a supernova soon – as in, sometime in the next 10,000 years – which doesn't sound soon to me, but scientists say in space time, that's nothing. In fact, the star may have already exploded, but because it's 8000 light years away, we may not have seen the explosion yet. This is a great analogy for the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is already but not yet. Like the star, it may simply be that the light hasn't reached us yet. Scripture points to a day when everything that divides us from one another will be overcome. Sin and death will not merely be robbed of power but eradicated altogether. Evil, injustice, and oppression will cease altogether. Pride, greed, rage, envy, lust, overconsumption and apathy will be purged from the human spirit. Scripture tells us it's already fait accompli! "At long last," writes Carpenter, "Christ's kingdom will come, and the long-standing promises of scripture will be fulfilled. What's old will be renewed. As shared in Genesis 2 and Revelations 22, a river of life will flow from God's perfect garden and a tree of life will welcome us all in its shade, and God will dwell among us. Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of the Bible, the alpha and omega, contain parallel promises of what Christ's kingdom will bring. In accordance with scriptures indeed. [adapted from "We Believe: How the Nicene Creed Can Deepen Your Faith" by Michael Carpenter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2025) pg. 75.] Thanks be to God! Amen.