

The Nicene Creed (IN UNISON) – 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 3:12-17

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 190

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Response to the Word

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

All: Thanks be to God!

Colossians 3:12-17

08/24/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

The Nicene Creed, Week 3: "One"

Pastor Amy Terhune

There's an old story about a church preschool teacher whose class was interrupted one Wednesday about an hour before dismissal. A new student was joining their class. The little boy was missing his left arm and since the class was almost over, and she was in the middle of lessons, the

teacher had no opportunity to learn any of the details about the cause of his missing arm or his state of adjustment. She was very nervous and afraid that one of the other children would comment on it and embarrass him. There was no opportunity to caution them, or to prepare them for how to treat someone kindly when their body is a little bit different, so she proceeded as carefully as possible. As the class time drew to a close, she began to relax. And that's when she asked the class to join her in their usual closing practice. "Let's make our churches," she said. "Here's the church and here's the steeple, open the doors and see ... " The awful truth of her own actions struck her. The very thing she had feared that the children would do, she had done. As she stood there ashamed and speechless, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over with her left hand and placed it up to his right hand and said, "Here, we can make the church together." [adapted from James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited: A Topical Collection of Hundreds of Stories, Quotations, & Humor* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 275.]

As we wrap up our sermon series on the Nicene Creed this week, we focus today on the oneness that's celebrated in the creed. One Lord. One church. One baptism. We make the church together. As we turn to the final section on the Holy Spirit and the nature of the Church, we remember that at Pentecost, we often speak about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit 50 days after Jesus' resurrection as being the birthday of the church, so the two are certainly connected. However, it is worth noting that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity, and as such, is not some kind of theological afterthought. It appears that way in the Creed because the nature and being of Jesus was the major controversy at the time. Although the term "trinity" never appears in scripture, Jesus commissions his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." So Jesus himself gives us the trinitarian formula. Moreover, it's worth noting that the Ruach of God (in Hebrew) or the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the water at creation in Genesis 1, and was in the breath that gave life to all beings, both in Genesis 2 and in the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. The Spirit is reported to have come upon Moses (Exodus 31:1-3), Joshua (Numbers 27:18), Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:25; 14:6) and many others to empower them to live their calling. After King David has committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed off her husband, we find him pleading in Psalm 51: do not cast me away from your presence nor take your Holy Spirit from me." The Spirit was there with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as a fourth companion in the fiery furnace, and the Prophet Joel foresaw the day when the Spirit would be poured out on all people (Joel 2:28-29). According to scholars, the major difference between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament canon is that before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit seemed to come to specific people for specific purposes and then return to God. The indwelling Holy Spirit as a lifetime companion of the faithful is a powerful gift given to the church at Pentecost. I'm not sure I fully buy that argument. I don't really think the Holy Spirit was that stingy with its gifts or its presence before Jesus – I think they just had a different way of talking about it, but maybe that's just semantics.

What I can tell you is this: I've never seen God ascending and descending a ladder like Jacob did. I've never climbed up into a cloud and come out glowing like Moses did after talking to God on the mountaintop. I've never touched the scars in Jesus hands or side like Thomas did or looked in his face and met his eyes like Peter did. I've never been knocked off my horse by Jesus' voice like the Apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus. But the Holy Spirit – the Spirit I've met. I have first-hand experience. The Holy Spirit has moved in my heart, in my life, calling me to the task before me; gifting me to speak when I didn't think I had a voice; somehow comforting others in pain and illness in spite of my own inadequacies; encouraging me to keep believing when all seems hopeless; driving me to grow and serve when I'd just as soon not; convicting my sin and wiping it out at once; prompting me to trust

in what I can't yet see, may never see with my eyes; inviting me to know and love God with all my heart. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life. I know because the Spirit has given me life. Believe me when I tell you that the trinity is not a math problem to think out. One in three; three in one. How can that be? I'm not asking you to check your brains at the door – I swear I am not, and I never would. But I am asking you to consider the possibility that the trinity is an experience rather than a math problem. It's a relationship, one that lives, that has a dynamic give, a flow about it, that is powered by love, and that welcomes you and I in. The Almighty holds out his hand. Jesus dies and rises on our behalf. And day after day, the Holy Spirit breathes in me, pointing me beyond itself to my connection with the divine. It's not static. It changes. It moves. It breathes. It lives. The nature of God is relational. That's the trinity. And if you let God touch your life, you'll feel it; know it; be immersed in it; and struggle to describe it just as I am now. But the fact that it's somewhat indescribable doesn't make it any less real.

When we worship God, we worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, if you prefer something less gender-heavy. However you want to put it, the Spirit is worthy of worship and glorification. And we continue to celebrate how the Spirit has spoken, not only through the prophets and the scriptures, but through modern-day prophets as well, such as Martin Luther, John Wesley, Harriet Tubman, Florence Nightengale, Martin Luther King Jr, and Corrie ten Boom. Those voices give us courage, guidance, strength, and inspiration – all gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

Before we move on, a bit of history that we have to address: the original Nicene Creed from 325 A.D. , which was edited in Constantinople in 381 A.D. states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Sometime in the late 6th Century, some churches in the west – predecessors of what eventually became the Roman Catholic Church – began to add a single phrase into the Nicene Creed that was not there originally. The phrase in Latin is *filioque*. It means “and from the Son”. As in: *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son...* The Eastern Church did not receive this editorial addition kindly. Some were willing to concede that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son, but even that was controversial. In fact, the church got so embroiled in controversy over that *filioque* clause that it was a major contributing factor to the schism between the Roman Church of the West and the Orthodox Church of the East in 1054 A.D. Today, the Roman Catholic church still uses the *filioque* clause when reciting the Nicene Creed. Eastern Orthodox Churches do not. Historically, most Protestant churches in the west have also used the *filioque* clause because we grew out of that tradition. You'll note, for example, that the official version of the Nicene Creed published by the United Methodist Church tells us that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son. However, just within the last year (2024), several protestant denominations, including the Anglican Communion and the ELCA, prompted by research and dialogue through the World Council of Churches, have recommended returning to the original text of the Nicene Creed and dropping the *filioque* clause. Not because they have a theological problem with the *filioque* clause in and of itself, but a gesture of good faith in healing divisions between the east and west, and it because it's faithful to the original manuscript. In most Protestant denominations in the US today, including the United Methodist Church, the Creed with or without the *filioque* clause are considered equally acceptable for use in worship.

As the Holy Spirit gives life and speaks in and through prophetic voices, the church continues to be the instrument God uses to build the Kingdom among us. And so we say together: We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. At this juncture the critic will jump in and say, “wait just a minute!” Just look at all the denominations, all the fighting, all the judging and bickering and name-calling and schisms still happening. We are not one. And we're certainly not holy. Holy means ‘set apart’ or distinct. Scripture says we're to be in the world but not of the world. Yet most churches have a certain worldliness about them. The news media has been awash in the last 50 years with the

church's unholiness – embezzlement, sexual abuse and scandal, emotional trauma, conflict and toxicity. Nor can we deny our historical heritage of unholy practices – antisemitism, racism, misogyny, bigotry, homophobia. The church has committed terrible atrocities from the Crusades to the Witch trials to Cultural whitewashing in Native American schools to more modern expressions of white Christian nationalism. We are not one or holy, laments the critic.

The term catholic requires a little more explanation. There's an asterisk there to explain the term means "universal" but that does not really capture the original Greek. Catholic means there are multiple church families that make one church. All churches (small c) belong to the Church (Capital C). No matter how hard we try, we don't get to tell others that they don't belong to the family, that they have no place in the Church. We judge, we argue, but we all belong. We're not merely one or holy. We're catholic, meaning, we're family, we're part of the whole. The final descriptor – apostolic – means the church traces its origins back to the apostles – the original disciples of Jesus Christ. In some traditions, including United Methodist, diligent clergy can put together an ordination tree that follows our ordination all the way back to the original Apostles through John Wesley. But more importantly, we trace our teachings back. There's a reason I still preach from a 2000-year-old document week after week. These are our roots, and they're still very relevant. Time and again, through history, the church has had to work to return to its roots. Martin Luther is most famous for this, but in every era, we have carefully balanced our call to be God's ambassadors in the current age without losing the essential truth that goes all the way back to our beginnings.

The truth is that there are times when the church is not any of these things. Not one. Not holy. Not catholic. And not apostolic. At this juncture in history, we catch glimpses, but one holy catholic and apostolic church remains more aspirational than something evidenced in our life together. I like how Michael Carpenter explains this. He says the church will never achieve these markers. We will never work ourselves into one holy catholic and apostolic church. Rather, these are gifts of God – promises to live into rather than benchmarks to measure up to. [concepts here adapted from "We Believe: How the Nicene Creed Can Deepen Your Faith" by Michael Carpenter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2025) pg. 98].

For the same reason, there is one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. You don't need to be baptized over and over and over again. You don't need to be baptized every time you mess up. And you don't need to be baptized every time you switch denominations. Baptism is Sacrament, meaning, "a holy mystery". In baptism, the grace of God brings us into community and God's grace works in us, forgiving our sinful nature. Some churches don't baptize people until they're old enough to acknowledge their sin and believe in Jesus. Others, like the United Methodist Church, practice infant baptism, believing that God's grace is what matters, not our actions. You'll find scriptural justification for both. Some immerse, some sprinkle, some pour. But the water is only the symbol. God is the one doing the work, washing us clean, immersing us in grace and new life, even before we understand it or can live into it. That's how God works. And historically, the church has a practice of recognizing the legitimacy of baptism across denominational lines and practices. This past year, word got out that some campers at Bayshore, which has historically been United Methodist, were being encouraged to be rebaptized without speaking to their parents or their pastors. This is expressly against our theological teachings, not only in the United Methodist Church, but also among Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Congregationalists, as established in our ancient creeds. Some Baptist, Pentecostal, and non-denomination churches insist on rebaptizing those who were baptized as infants, and the board at Bayshore has had to do some education and dialogue so as to not lose campers or denominational support. Again, these issues matter. They affect how we relate

to one another and how we carry out ministry. As one pastor rightly expressed concern: what does it say about God and about them when we tell children that their baptism isn't good enough?

As I mentioned last week: scripture is very clear that the world as it is, is not the way it will always be, and this is really good news for us. Jesus famously promises Mary and Martha beside the tomb of their brother Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life: those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live." I've spoken those words of comfort at countless funerals and deathbeds. The creed calls us to bank the promise of Jesus: We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Religion is not a pie-in-the-sky promise that someday we'll escape the suffering of earth. Rather, like the description of the church, the creed calls us to look for what we can't yet see – a world described in the final chapters of Revelation. Not souls flying upward, but heaven itself descending – a new heaven and a new earth where God takes up residence with humankind and creation is not abandoned, but fully and wholly redeemed.

And we're invited to be part of that work – to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving as we've been forgiven, opening ourselves to the peace of Christ, and see all through the lens of gratitude and faith. That's how Paul described it to the Colossians in Chapter 3. In his sermon on *The Catholic Spirit*, John Wesley says it most profoundly when he writes: "But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without any doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite. Beyond our doctrine, our polity, our practice, our unique traditions, the church is called to embody the oneness of God – faith, hope, love. Let it be so. Amen.