



When I was a teenager I had a very definite faith. I believed that the Bible was the inerrant word of God. I knew pretty much all there was to know about Christianity, and I practiced it. But as I grew up I suffered from severe depression and my faith gave me no answers. I became confused between the sacramental and symbolic Anglo-Catholic faith that I had grown up in, and the fundamentalist proclamations of my chosen people. I tried turning away from God and became an atheist for three days - but that brought me no peace either.

Eventually it became clear that Christianity had no antidote to my depression and that since all my attempts to be heterosexual had failed, there was no place for me in church of any flavor. I became a lurker. I went to church occasionally and left before the end of the service. I got to know church members and enjoyed their company and the reminder of Christian community. But there was no place there for people like me.

I sought a new home in esoteric metaphysics but could never quite get on board with the program which so often seemed to be as certain and self-consciously righteous as the Christianity of my teen years. Yet many of the teachings shed new light on the Bible, new ways of seeing our life in Christ and it drew me back.

When we moved to Los Osos 26 years ago, St. Benedict's was the first Episcopal Church where I worshipped more than lurked. But even here I didn't feel that I belonged. It took time away and then returning before I was able to accept myself in faith community and so find acceptance among you. It was really then that my faith began to blossom.

Over the four years of seminary and then in the daily challenge of articulating our calling and our faith in this community I have grown

into what I fondly imagine to be a mature faith. I no longer think I can work it all out. I know that as soon as I think I have God sorted out and neatly categorized, she has moved on. I know that there are ambiguities and mysteries and that the things which seem so sure today seem so uncertain tomorrow.

Today we will say the Nicene Creed together. This is the statement of our faith which was written in the 4th century, and has not been superseded in our branch of the Christian church. This has become a stumbling block for many of us as it seems to suggest that in order to be a Christian, in order to belong, one needs to accept as fact a number of unlikely things. The word “Credo” has been translated as “I believe,” but it’s not really “I believe” in the sense of “I accept as fact”. It expresses more of a heart belief than a mind belief. Which is why we have chosen to substitute the word trust for believe. The Creed declares that we believe or trust in God the Trinity and then makes many descriptive statements about the persons of the Trinity and also about the Church as the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is the foundation on which we stand. It was expressed in the reading this morning from 1 John:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

The reason for our saying the Nicene Creed is not to be exclusive, not to hold up a doctrinal statement that we keep each other to, but as an expression of our fellowship. An expression of our participation in the Godhead which we try to describe in human words, and our fellowship with all the generations who have gone before us and who have expressed their fellowship with God and one another in the words that came out of the conflicts of the 4th century. This is one of the ways that we honor our ancestors and also one of the ways that we articulate the word of God expressed through God's people.

But of course it is not the only way. In the reading from Acts we heard that "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them." From the earliest days of the church, fellowship has been important. I know many people say they don't need to go to church in order to be spiritual. I am sure that is true for some. I would have said that in my lurking years. But that is not the model that we have from the early church. In fact, quite the reverse.

Our fellowship is not just with God but with one another. Even the Desert Fathers who lived in the Egyptian desert in the 3rd century, most of them as hermits or in very small groups, said "Your life and your death is with your neighbor." "Your life and your death is with your neighbor." This is an expression of the 2 great commandments – to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

It is easy to love your neighbor when you don't have much contact. I can feel very loving towards someone I only see occasionally, someone who sees my best side and gets to show theirs. It's quite a different matter when I see that person week after week when they're on their best form and when they're not. In faith community we get to grapple with the challenges of making relationships, maintaining relationships, dealing

with irritation and anger, facing the changes that happen in relationships especially when people who are important to us move away or change themselves.

St. Benedict's is a community where "great grace was upon them all." We are deeply blessed whenever we worship together by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the angels made real by our combined trust and invitation. We are deeply blessed by those who have been part of this community for all our days and by those who just came in a few weeks ago. We are deeply blessed by the many different expressions of spirituality and of faith among us. We are deeply blessed by the weekly expression of our fellowship with one another and with the Trinity – our fellowship which does not come from our being against something or someone, but is drawn together by the power of God.

This is a great blessing to us and it is one that we get to share. We get to share it with our families, with our neighbors, with those we know and those we don't yet know. I thank you each and every one of you for the blessing that you bring by sharing your faith and your trust in God as you understand God with each of us.

Amen