

**“Interwoven with the Trinity”    New London UMC    Trinity, June 12-13, 2022**  
**Psalm 8 UMH #743; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; John 16:12-15; Romans 5:1-15 Message Rev. Joyce Rich**

For supposedly being such a central part of our theological understanding of God, the Trinity does not seem to be something that many people feel they have a solid, or even ‘good’ understanding of. . . . I know your faces will blanch and there will be a nervous or anxious stirring throughout the congregation if I ask you to describe the nature of the Trinity. . . . And there it is! . . . But have no fear! What I’d like you to do is open the large hymnal to #880 to see The Nicene Creed; and across from it #881 The Apostle’s Creed. What you see on these two pages is a battleground. I realize it isn’t the same kind of battleground as Gettysburg, or Omaha Beach, or the area around the steel plant in Mariupol, Ukraine. But what you see here is what remains of a battle over words, and how those words were – and are – understood, to describe the Trinity.

Even a quick glance across the two pages will show that both of the creeds are structured in three parts. Why do you think they share that in common? . . . Try to keep your place marked for the creeds, while flipping to page 35 at the front of the hymnal to the first baptismal covenant. Starting in the middle of the page we find that the baptismal covenant includes the Apostles’ Creed – used as responses to three questions: Do you believe in God the Father?; Do you believe in Jesus Christ?; Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? . . . At every baptism these questions are asked and answered.

The current form of the Apostles’ Creed is believed to have originated in Gaul during the fifth century CE; and was a modified version of what was termed as an “Old Roman Creed” from the fourth century CE; which probably had its origin in a late second century CE rules of faith which had been used in early Christian baptismal rites. It is the oldest and simplest confessional creed of the Christian church – and is named in honor of the apostles who first confessed and witnessed to their faith in Christ.

Turn back to #880 and #881. You’ll note that the Apostles’ Creed is much shorter than the Nicene Creed, although the first section in both creeds is very similar. Things start to diverge in the second section. The Apostles’ Creed doesn’t try to explain much about Jesus Christ being the “only Son” of God. Whereas the Nicene Creed details how Jesus Christ is “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, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” That’s a very amplified understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. But since there was a whole council of people who worked on this creed in Nicea in 325 CE – it represented how the Christian church’s theological thinking had expanded and grown over the years. However when the council met again in 381 CE in Constantinople, some revisions were made to the creed. And that leads us to the third section of the creed.

You might note that the Nicene Creed is quite different from the Apostles' Creed in this third section about the Holy Spirit. The Constantinople council of 381 CE did *not* as a whole approve what you see here in the Nicene Creed. The original text read, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, and who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified." But when the western part of the Christian church started to add in the phrase "and the Son" – as also being where the Spirit proceeded from, well! that was viewed by the eastern part of the Christian church as a theological error and an unauthorized addition. That little phrase, "and the Son" – known in Latin as the "*Filioque*" clause became one of the reasons the Christian church split in two with one half becoming what we know as the Roman Catholic Church, and the other half becoming what we know as the Eastern Orthodox Church.

This is part of our Christian heritage: that the One God who can be known in many ways has a diversity of followers who claim very different things as being the only way to correctly understand God as Trinity. I have come to think that most of the battles that have been fought between the followers of God have been more about wanting "our own words" rather than "God's Word"; and wanting "our own understanding" of God to prevail rather than simply loving and serving God. These pitched battles over "who is right" basically ignore the fact that only God is right and holy.

So maybe the Christian church in all of the many forms it has split into should refocus on the humble, unselfish, cooperative, and loving nature of a Trinitarian God that we find in our scripture readings. How Christ reveals the Father; how the Holy Spirit reveals Christ; how the Father is willing to be open to human life, suffering, and death through the incarnate Christ, and at work through the Spirit. That this divine give and take, through loving sharing and support, flows not only within the Trinity – but through the Trinity to us. And that our mutual love and care and service for one another and for God wraps back around like threads woven together into the beautiful fabric of our life with God.

Perhaps all we really need to do is to lay aside our desire to be independently "right" in order to live rightly with one another and with God. To not overly explain the Trinity but to live within the love we share with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Which points us back to what the first apostles confessed about their faith in God. I invite you to join me in remembering what we believe by sharing the Apostles' Creed, #881 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Amen.