

“Believe!”

When I attended Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, Missouri – a suburb of St. Louis, students had to write their Credo. Credo is a Greek word which means “believe”, so each of us wrote about what we believed as individuals. I’m confident, churches expected young graduates of Eden to be able to articulate what they believed.

When I teach a Confirmation Class, a major task for each Confirmand has been to write her or his own Personal Statement of Belief and then to read it to the congregation during Confirmation Sunday – the Sunday when they are Confirmed. It is my hope that going through such an experience and process is meaningful and will provide a good foundation for their own faith pilgrimage.

After the Original Disciples of Jesus died, the leadership of the early Christian congregations realized their potential new members, including their children, would not have the opportunity to hear from or talk to someone, who was actually one of Jesus’ Original Disciples. To help future Church members have an informed faith, several activities were undertaken. One was to collect and canonized the New Testament Scriptures. Creeds were also developed to provide basic information for new converts. They would learn a creed or catechism in conjunction with being baptized and confirmed.

Among those creeds, one was developed over the years, which eventually was named the Apostles’ Creed. There is considerable disagreement about when the Apostles’ Creed was written. One view is that it was written rather late, such as around 800 A.D. However, one church historian reported his own congregation was using it shortly after 400 A.D. Although it is referred to as the Apostles’ Creed, it was not written by the Apostles or even one of them. What we can say is, the early Church collected descriptions of Jesus, his ministry, death, and resurrection from the Gospels and other New Testament books. They then tried to summarize what those testimonies stated about God and Jesus. So, the Creed included ancient testimonies but the document – itself, was not written by any of the Original Disciples or Apostles.

Periodically, Round Grove United Church has used the Apostles’ Creed as one way we express our unity with the historic Christian Church. We do not use it as a test of faith. There are some aspects of it which may be confusing to folks today. For example, a later addition to the creed – the reference to Jesus descending into hell

or hades did not mean he was sent there as punishment. Instead, it seems the testimony was he went to those who have died to minister to them and to usher them from the land of the dead to eternal life in God's Kingdom.

I encourage everyone to compose his or her own statement of belief or credo. Such grounding helps an individual to respond more intentionally and appropriately as we seek to live as people of faith in Jesus Christ while living in this world. As this Worship Celebration puts focus on the theme "believe!", I urge you to contemplate your own faith affirmations.

Finally, let me briefly share my own beliefs about Jesus Christ, as we examine this subject of what Christians believe. I believe the essence of the one we call Jesus the Christ was the creative force – the Word, which brought about Creation, Life, and Light. I believe human beings throughout history have often given in to the negative or evil urges to separate ourselves from our Maker, one another, and our own welfare. I believe God sought to reach out and transform us through the Prophets. Unfortunately, all of God's overtures were rejected by the vast majority of people because they could not accept God had forgiven and accepted them. Finally, our Divine Parent chose to act radically. Our Creator sent the Word in the flesh – as Jesus, the Son of God! Jesus' Life, Ministry, Healings, Teachings, Miracles, Death, and Resurrection fulfilled God's Purpose of revealing God's Radical and Extravagant Forgiveness, Welcome, and Agape Love. Many persons recognized what God did in and through the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus the Christ – the Son of God. Because he died for us and was raised for us, you and I, along with all people, can trust God – our Divine Parent Loves us Sacrificially and with Great Suffering! I believe the Resurrection of Jesus Christ both demonstrates God is victorious over death or any other power and that our Creator's Agape Love for us is so great, we know we are Invited, Welcomed, and Forgiven. We Faith or Trust we have a New Faith Relationship with God and a New Agape Loving Life in Jesus Christ because of God's Love manifested in our Crucified and Risen Savior! I believe today and always, we are called to share this Good News in both words and deeds – following our Savior's example. Do you believe? Amen.