

At the 10:30 am Trinity Sunday service on May 30, 2010, The Rev. Cornel Barnett delivered the following sermon based on “A Brief Statement of Faith.”

“The Trinity - What we believe about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit”

Since today is Trinity Sunday, the sermon is about the trinity: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

We will read together sections of “A Brief Statement of Faith.” Before the reading I shall say a few words (which I’m doing now). After each reading I shall provide a commentary. The first commentary will follow the statement on Jesus, the second on God, and the third on the Holy Spirit.

“A Brief Statement of Faith” was published in 1983 when the two largest Presbyterian denominations in the United States reunited. They were the northern and southern branches of the Presbyterian church that split during the Civil War.

Since people in a church are people of the community like us it was natural (although absurd in a way) that the churches were divided. It took over 100 years for them to come together again. They combined to form the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The "Plan for Reunion" called for the preparation of a brief statement of the Reformed faith for inclusion in the *Book of Confessions*. A Brief Statement of Faith celebrates our rediscovery that for all our undoubted diversity, we are bound together by a common faith and a common task. It lifts up concerns that call most urgently for the church's attention in our time. Although written in 1983 it is still relevant.

Some people confuse confessions with dogma. When confessions are used as the only word of faith they are dogmatic. Presbyterian confessions are guides for our faith and most of the earlier confessions are more historical than what we are expected to believe today. The latest confessions like “A Brief Statement of Faith” speak most clearly and relevantly to us – as we will see.

It is not the final or whole word on what we believe. We are the church reformed always reforming according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit. We’re in process.

Let us say the statement together. It’s printed in the insert. Let us read the introductory portion and the statement on Jesus, in other words, the first two paragraphs.

A Brief Statement of Faith

In life and in death we belong to God.

Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.

We trust in **Jesus Christ**,
 Fully human, fully God.
 Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
 preaching good news to the poor
 and release to the captives,
 teaching by word and deed
 and blessing the children,
 healing the sick
 and binding up the brokenhearted,
 eating with outcasts,
 forgiving sinners,
 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
 Jesus was crucified,
 suffering the depths of human pain
 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
 God raised Jesus from the dead,
 vindicating his sinless life,
 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 delivering us from death to life eternal.

[Silent meditation]

The statement speaks for itself.

A key phrase is that Jesus was “fully human, fully God.” What does it mean to be “fully” something? We *believe* that Jesus was the fullest expression we know of God on earth, so full that he was fully God. The statement provides a great character sketch of who he was.

We read in scripture that Jesus did indeed proclaim the reign of God to counter the reign of emperors. They dominated, Jesus served. He was with and for the people: blessing, healing and eating with outcasts. Jesus’ radical reign led to his death but he rose again and in doing so affirmed eternal *life* for all who believe in him.

Let us read together the statement on God.

We trust in **God**,
 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
 In sovereign love God created the world good
 and makes everyone equally in God's image
 male and female, of every race and people,
 to live as one community.
 But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
 Ignoring God's commandments,
 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
 accept lies as truth,

exploit neighbor and nature,
 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
 We deserve God's condemnation.
 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
 In everlasting love,
 the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
 to bless all families of the earth.
 Hearing their cry,
 God delivered the children of Israel
 from the house of bondage.
 Loving us still,
 God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
 like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
 God is faithful still.

[Silent meditation]

The statement speaks for itself.

God is personal (a divine parent) and God is love. God created the earth and called it good. God commands that our lives be moral. When we depart from God's commandments, nature and intentions we "ignore" God. Thus,

- We violate the image of God in others when we discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity and class.
- We accept lies as truth when we accept media manipulation and government propagandistic pronouncements.
- We exploit neighbor and nature when we endanger and hamper workers before and after oil spills.
- We threaten death to the planet entrusted in our care when we ignore sound environmental policies and practices.

No matter how far we go in the wrong God does not abandon us. God continues to love us and faithfully restores us to our true humanity. God is faithful.

Let's read together the statement on the Holy Spirit.

We trust in God the **Holy Spirit**,
 everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
 The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
 sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
 and binds us together with all believers
 in the one body of Christ, the church.
 The same Spirit
 who inspired the prophets and apostles
 rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,

engages us through the Word proclaimed,
 claims us in the waters of baptism,
 feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
 and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.
 In a broken and fearful world
 the Spirit gives us courage
 to pray without ceasing
 to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
 to unmask idolatries in church and culture,
 to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
 and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
 In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
 we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
 and to live holy and joyful lives,
 even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
 praying, Come, Lord Jesus!
 [Silent meditation]

The statement speaks for itself.

This is a wonderful statement of the church – you and me – in action. It's an energizer and challenge. The spirit enables us to make the choice to believe and to act on our faith.

Before Jesus departed the earth he said he would send the Holy Spirit to comfort and inspire us. The Spirit would enable us to continue Jesus' ministry. The Spirit brought into being the Body of Christ, the church.

Again, the modern challenge is highlighted in unmasking idolatries in church and culture. The question is who are we worshipping? This is not entirely modern. It goes back to worship of the golden calf in the Hebrew Bible? Who are the voices of people long silenced: women, children, prisoners, mentally ill, hungry, refugees, homeless, immigrants and people living with HIV/AIDS?

Finally, when we witness to Jesus as Lord (our primary authority) and Savior (the one who heals) we work with others for justice, freedom and peace. How do we marry peace with justice? What is freedom for an abused woman, a starving child, or someone caught in the prison of their fears or trapped in something they cannot control? Life is not easy and yet we are called to work with others for justice, freedom and peace.

Let us say the conclusion of the statement together. I would be quite happy if the statement included God as Father and Mother.

With believers in every time and place,
 we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
 can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.