

This I Believe
A Sermon for Confirmation Sunday

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Bedford Presbyterian Church
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Like many of you, I grew up going to church with my family. And going to Sunday School and to the middle school and high school youth groups. And to Confirmation. But, in that church, I did not have to write a *Statement of Faith* because we already had one which we said in church each week. It was called the *The Apostle's Creed*, written around 390 C.E. I said it so often then that I still remember it today.

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried:
He descended into hell;
The third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
The holy Catholic Church;
The Communion of Saints;
The Forgiveness of sins;
The Resurrection of the body,
And the Life everlasting.
Amen.*

Growing up it was understood that if you said you were a Christian...
If you were going to join the church...

This is what you were supposed to believe. No questions asked. No questions allowed. The problem I faced as I grew older was that I did have questions. Lots of them. And, as I asked those questions and continued to learn more, I found that I while I understood the history and the background and the intent of what was in the *The Apostle's Creed*, I didn't necessary believe all of it any more. Believe...as in accepting all of it without question or doubt. Believe...at least in the way that I did when I was young. And, for a while, my questions made me wonder if I could no longer say I was a Christian.

But, what I discovered...

And what I have tried to pass on to you...

Is that it is okay to ask questions.

It is okay to have different ways of understanding the Bible.

It is okay that you have different ways of thinking about who God is and what God does and even what we mean when we use the word *God*.

It is okay as long as you keep stretching for the answers and don't become lazy in your thinking and revert to the one response that I don't accept in Confirmation: *I don't know* when it is said in a way that means *I am not willing to think about it*.

So, as we end Confirmation, but not your journey of faith, I want to leave you with this...

If it is...

- Okay to question the Bible, and...
- Okay to have different ways of understanding miracles and creation, and...
- Okay to discuss, even disagree, about what the Bible means by the virgin birth or the resurrection or what we mean when we use the term *Son of God* when talking about Jesus...

Is there anything that you have to believe or have to do if you are to call yourself Christian and a member of this church?

The answer is *yes*. I think there is.

Here is what I think is essential. Five things...

- That to the best of your ability, and trying to do better each day, you follow this teaching of Jesus...that you treat others the way you would like to be treated. Not just friends or family or those who look like you or act like you or live where you live, but "others" treat them the way you would like to be treated.
- That you keep asking what I think is the most important religious question of the day: *Who is my neighbor?* and, as you continue to discover the answer to that question, you remember that Jesus summed up the whole Bible by saying, "You shall love God with your heart, mind, soul and strength. And your neighbor as yourself."
- That you live your life in a way that creates...
 - More hope than despair;
 - More understanding than prejudice:
 - More equality than inequality:
 - More forgiveness than guilt:
 - More peace than violence.

For by doing so you help to create a world closer to what God intends for you and for me and for all.

- That you are keeping asking questions, but be sure they are the right questions to be asking because someone once said (and I think he is correct), that "If they get you asking the wrong questions they don't have to worry about the answers. Asking the "right" questions will lead you to more insight and a deeper understanding. And don't be afraid to express your doubts. Again, someone said "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith."
- And finally, that you find a way to be a part of a community that, like you, is asking the right questions and encouraging each other to do the "right" things. While we all might like to think that we are smart enough or strong enough and sure enough to do it on our own, I don't think that is true. More often than not, we need the support and the encouragement of others. I think that Christina is absolutely correct when she wrote in her *Statement of Faith*, "*I think it is important to join the church because by doing so you are officially entering a community with people who have similar values and who can help you make the world a better place.*"

And, with all that being said, I would like to end with this...

Thank you for being a part of Confirmation this year.

Thank you for your questions, your searching, your insights and your faith.