

Reflections on the Nicene Creed
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At a gathering last month in Philadelphia that focused on *The Wisdom Jesus*, one of the main speakers began to talk about the Nicene Creed, with an eyeball roll and some tongue in cheek comments about how dry and esoteric it all is, how the debates that formed the Creed way back when were like debating the number of angels dancing on the head of a pin, and most especially, how this boring philosophy is so at odds with the living, loving, embracing, dancing, laughter of God.

And I must say, that while I have tremendous respect for and aloha toward this speaker, her words bothered me, a lot. Perhaps because we seem so easily to discard 1700 years of received wisdom. Perhaps because when I find myself slowing down with its words, rather than the bored rote recitation it usually receives, I begin to see glimpses of raw beauty and deep insight in its words. That by affirming a sacred Trinity, all equal, all in love, all also distinct, the very nature of God is relationship, and as creatures made in God's image, relationship with all of creation is also our sacred call, our sacred destiny. The Creed is therefore not only about who God is, it's about who we are too.

And it answers questions that persist throughout the centuries; like, was Jesus just a man or was he a divine being pretending to be human? Did he actually die or did he just fake his death? Did he even exist as a real person in history, or was he a made up figure by folks fomenting a new religion? Was he raised from the dead, and did something happen to his physical body in that raising, or, as some modern scholars now argue, was his corpse thrown into a pit to be eaten by dogs?

Important questions that perhaps others contributing to these articles will take up. But even on their face, you can see what a difference it makes to our lives if the answers to these

questions are different than what the Creed provides. And that, it seems to me, is the point of the Creed: it provides OUR answers to the fundamental questions of our faith.

William Willimon tells the story of one of his theology classes at Duke. The Nicene Creed was the topic and the speaker was an older Greek Orthodox priest. A student raised his hand and said: “I can’t affirm some of the statements in the Creed!” To which the priest replied, “just keep saying it.” But the student persisted that some parts of the Creed, “I just don’t believe!” To which the priest replied: “Young man, it’s not YOUR Creed, it’s OUR Creed, so just keep saying it, eventually … it will come to you!”

After wrestling with my reaction to that Wisdom Teacher’s dissing of the Creed, these words were given to me, which soothed me and explained, at least for me, why it is I can always affirm that “We believe....”

The Creed comes in
For criticism,
An artless, boring scripting
Written centuries ago
By rulers seeking harmony
A by-gone era making by-gone claims.
One does not recite Creed
When falling in love
Is at hand!
And yet, perhaps the Creed
Is something like
marriage vows.
The vows are not the lovemaking
But they set loves’ stakes.
They enclose and define and give
Substance (and boundaries?) to passion.
And while passion exists without them,
The vows perhaps give a beauty
And dignity the lovemaking
may not otherwise possess.
The Creed is rightly read
In paradox as are the vows,
As are all things that truly matter,
For in the tension,
the Seeming incongruity,
God smiles.

Perhaps the Creed
Is the bridal tent itself
In which deepest
 Love
 Is shared.

Thank you to our Bishop for inviting these reflections. At a time when so much of a faithful life is challenged by fundamentalist narcissism and liberal flattening of what is truly real, the Creed can serve as a steady guide as we trudge this road of happy destiny!