

Radicalizing the Nicene Creed in its 1700th Year

Session 1: October 4, 2025, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

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It seems that folks are more politically active these days, and members and friends of St. John's in Ouray are no exception. We've written more letters to our politicians, attended more townhall meetings, and participated in more rallies than ever before. We're compelled by a wide range of concerns, but we seem united in our convictions that in the midst of it all, we're following Jesus and bearing witness to his way of justice, truth, and love. At the same time, we find ourselves more attentive, personally and corporately, to the resources of our faith and our own spirited authenticities that keep that faith alive as we address the urgent issues of our day.

According to Catholic social activist Susan Vilas Boas, "what we have to remember is that 'belief' is not the result of an elaborate process of seeking knowledge." Rather, it is the starting point for a specific way of life. "The inherent depth of the act of believing derives from its intimate relationship with life." This is expressed in the original meaning of the Latin word for believing, *credere*, with its deeper Indo-European roots that suggest an inner direction and dynamic of faith. What we believe *in* is "that for which we give our heart."

This is what's so *radical* about the "We believes" in the Nicene Creed (also known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, 381 CE), even in its 1700th year! Despite its "tangle of misunderstandings and ambiguities" (Boas)—Christians from around the world and over the centuries recognize the far-reaching ways it informs and inspires our faith, not for certainty's sake, but for the sake of living day to day in love with the Triune-God. This is what the Creed is fundamentally about, and this is how it reshapes and redirects our attention to what is in-play in the world that God makes, redeems, and restores out of love.

So perhaps it is time to dust off the Creed and put it to work. Despite their impenetrable mysteries, the 'We believes' evoke an awesome sense of God's triune presence and activity for life's sake, love's sake, and the world's sake.

We believe for life's sake.

To start with, notice what the Nicene Creed says about life:

- "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen."
- "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . through him all things were made."
- "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life."

In other words, God is all about LIFE! Creator-Father God *makes* life *through* the Son of God, and it all becomes *gift* by the Holy Spirit of God. The story of God is the story of life itself. Like all stories it has a lot of explanatory value, not through a list of propositions so much as a three-part drama of a three-personed God acting in history.

This story is incredibly far-reaching and incredibly personal at the same time. It conveys *some* sense of ultimate reality, a frame of reference that can help us make *some* sense of what life throws our way. But it also has something to say about *where* and, better yet, *who* we are in the midst of it all—in effect, locating ourselves as individuals and communities designed and destined for life in the kingdom of the Triune God. No wonder then that our Holy Eucharist liturgy sets the stage for this cosmic drama by the celebrant's opening declaration—"Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"—then our response—"And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen."

We believe for love's sake.

The Creed is the story of every person, most especially every person as they are *loved* by God. And if we have a hard time imagining that, go to the very center of the Creed, in its 2nd paragraph, for a detailed account of God's love for us through the mission of the Son of God, our Lord, Jesus Christ. "*For us and for our salvation* he came down from heaven, and by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate," ultimately "*for our sake*" through his crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Notice that all three of the divine persons are acting in a drama that is *for us*.

A closer look at the Creed shows that they are acting *in communion*, which is what the Triune God's love looks like internally, and externally as it unfolds in our individual lives and the life of the world. This *communion* is not an exclusive possession of the three divine persons, but the overflowing, incarnating, in-the-flesh, in-the-neighborhood sort of love we see in Jesus. This is where the Creed gets down to earth, into our humanity, into the reality of our sin, and the redemption of it all in Christ's cross-shaped mission of love.

The communion of the Trinity is a hard concept for us, but one way to avoid getting lost in the metaphysical details of the Creed is to remember that the three divine persons are inherently disposed to loving communion, to relationship... most perfectly, among themselves, and also with us (and indeed all creation) through the Incarnation of Jesus the Christ. Recall these words from our Prayer Book's Eucharistic Prayer B: "We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us... above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son..."

In the sacramental act of Holy Communion we see and taste this love in our lives, individually and corporately, nourishing us for participation in Christ's mission. Our identity derives chiefly from this communion of love, as an identity-in-relation expressed in the Creed, embodied in Holy Communion, and deployed in the missional 'liturgy after the liturgy.'

We believe for the world's sake.

When we say 'We believe' we are assuming, consciously or otherwise, a reason for living in a particular way. We just noted how the disposition of the Trinity towards loving communion predisposes us, "by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (quoting from the Collect for Purity) towards the love of God and one another, overflowing into mission in the wider world. You'll recall how this missional life is expressed in Rite II's post-Communion prayer: "Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord."

This is what mission looks like in living response to the Creed, noting especially the Holy Spirit's constitution of the "one holy catholic and apostolic Church" through our baptism and our resurrection outlook on the "life of the world to come." We're on a mission, and it's all there in the third paragraph of the ancient witness from Nicaea and Constantinople. This shows us how mission unifies and spirits us into a universal body of believers bearing forth the apostolic good news of Christ. It's not enough to celebrate the ecumenical ascent to the Creed that we see in its 1700th year, bringing together Christians from across the denominational spectrum in remarkable display of "We believes" with one voice; we can also join together in concrete ways for the sake of mission *to* the world.

Here we discover new pathways of justice and mercy. When we say we believe in One God, we envision new possibilities for solidarity as we join others in proclaiming in word and deed the mission of God. When we say we believe in One Lord Jesus Christ, we see incarnational possibilities in that mission, living more deeply into his self-giving love. And when we say we believe in the Holy Spirit, we discern the marvelous and manifold agency of God in our healing, liberating, and renewing actions for the sake of all God's creatures and, indeed, across the "face of the earth."

In sum, the Nicene Creed, especially in the context of heart-felt worship, fires our imaginations and sets our lives and loves in motion for gospel-shaped mission to the world. That's radical!