

Key Verse:

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:19-20

In Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul has just described the armor of God which includes:

- ♥ the belt of truth,
- ♥ the breastplate of righteousness,
- ♥ the shield of faith,
- ♥ the helmet of salvation, and
- ♥ the sword of the Spirit

In verse 18, Paul then calls the attention of the readers to the power of prayer, and encourages his readers in Asia to keep on praying for all the saints. By praying for one another, Christians everywhere help fellow believers overcome the evil influences bent on destroying those whom God has called. Moreover, he includes himself among those who need the prayers of the saints (verse 19). He requests his readers to pray that, whenever he speaks, the right words will come to him so that he will declare the mystery of the gospel, even though and because of which, he is in chains. In those chains, he remains, nonetheless, an ambassador, intent on carrying out his mission fearlessly (lit. “boldly”). (Luke uses the same root word in Acts 28:20 to describe Paul's two-year ministry under guard in Rome, perhaps answering the question of the epistle's origin.)¹

Questions:

- ♥ Read **Ephesians 6:10-17**. How does the armor of God go together with prayer?

- ♥ Why should we ask people to pray for us?

¹ Based on *Ashbury Bible Commentary*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/asbury-bible-commentary/Provisions-triumphant-living>

The key idea for this week is “I share my faith with others to fulfill God’s purposes.” The United Methodist website states under the section “Our Faith Journey”²:

Faith is the basic orientation and commitment of our whole being—a matter of heart and soul. Christian faith is grounding our lives in the living God as revealed especially in Jesus Christ. It’s both a gift we receive within the Christian community and a choice we make. It’s trusting in God and relying on God as the source and destiny of our lives. Faith is believing in God, giving God our devoted loyalty and allegiance. Faith is following Jesus, answering the call to be his disciples in the world. Faith is hoping for God’s future, leaning into the coming kingdom that God has promised. Faith-as-belief is active; it involves trusting, believing, following, hoping.

Questions:

- ♥ How do you describe faith?

- ♥ How comfortable are you with sharing your faith?
 - What might make you more comfortable with sharing your faith?

Faith³

A biblical word that refers both to intellectual belief and to relational trust or commitment. The biblical authors generally do not make a distinction between faith as belief and faith as trust, but tend to see true faith as consisting of both what is believed (e.g., that God exists, that Jesus is Lord) and the personal commitment to a person who is trustworthy, reliable, and able to save (that is, trust in the person of Christ as the way to salvation).

² <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/reflecting-on-our-faith>

³ Faith - Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, page 50

Questions:

- ♥ Would you define faith differently now?

NOTE: It may be helpful to have a copy of the United Methodist Hymnal on hand if you want to look at all the creeds and affirmations listed in the article below. In particular, we will be looking at the Nicene Creed (880) and the Apostles' Creed (881). Other creeds and affirmations include:

- ♥ Apostles' Creed, Ecumenical Version (882)
- ♥ A Statement of Faith of the United Church in Canada (883)
- ♥ A Statement of Faith of the Korean Methodist Church (884)
- ♥ A Modern Affirmation (885)
- ♥ The World Methodist Social Affirmation (886)
- ♥ Affirmation from Romans 8:35, 37-39 (887)
- ♥ Affirmation from 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 and Colossians 1:15-20 (888)
- ♥ Affirmation from 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 1:15, 3:16

Why do we say creeds?⁴

Unlike some churches that require affirmation of a strict list of beliefs as a condition of membership, The United Methodist Church is not a creedal church.

So why do we recite creeds during worship?

The United Methodist Hymnal contains nine creeds or affirmations. Only two of these (Nicene and Apostles') are strictly considered to be creeds because they are products of ecumenical councils.

The remaining affirmations are taken from Paul's letters (Corinthians, Colossians, Romans and Timothy) along with affirmations from the United Church of Canada, the Korean Methodist Church and the United Methodist Social Affirmation.

⁴ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/why-do-we-say-creeds>

United Methodists are not required to believe every word of the affirmations. Church founder, John Wesley himself did not agree with a historic (Athanasian) creed, because he disliked its emphasis on condemning people to hell.

Affirmations help us come to our own understanding of the Christian faith. They affirm our unity in Christ with those followers who first wrote them, the many generations who have recited them before us and those who will recite them after we have gone.

-The Rev. J. Richard Peck

The Rev. J. Richard Peck is [former] editor of Newscope and United Methodist resources including The Book of Resolutions and the Daily Christian Advocate.

Questions:

- ♥ Briefly look at the creeds and affirmations in the United Methodist Hymnal. Is there anything that stands out?
 - Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable?

- ♥ How do “affirmations help us to come to our own understanding of the Christian faith”?

But in order to share our faith, we need to know what we believe. Let’s look at two different creeds used within the Methodist church to determine our fundamental beliefs. A creed is a formal statement of Christian beliefs.

The Apostle's Creed⁵

The affirmation of faith most widely used by United Methodists. The Apostles' Creed derives its name from its use in the Christian church from as early as A.D. 150 and the early belief that it was used by the apostles. Beginning in the third century, this creed was used at baptisms by the Roman Catholic Church. Through the years it has been used widely by both Roman Catholics and Protestants as the formative statement of the faith into which Christians are baptized.

Traditional Version⁶

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 Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;*
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at 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 Spirit,
the holy catholic* * church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Traditional use of this creed includes these words: "He descended into hell."

* * universal - The word catholic comes from the Greek word *katholikos* which means "universal" or "general."⁷

⁵ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/apostles-creed>

⁶ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/apostles-creed-traditional-ecumenical>

⁷ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/why-do-we-say-we-believe-in-the-holy-catholic-church-in-the-apostles-creed>

THE APOSTLES' CREED

based on theological formulas current around A.D. 100, though present form probably appeared in 6th or 7th century

Creator of everything in universe — I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

"Anointed One," Messiah (Luke 4:16-21; Mark 8:29) — And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; one to whom we owe allegiance

Jesus is both human and divine — who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; * Jesus experienced pain and death as we do.

Jesus the risen Christ lives with the Eternal God. — the third day he rose from the dead; God won! Reason for Christian hope

— he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; — The future belongs to God.

— from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. *the living*

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic ^{**} church, — The family of all people, past, present, and future, who do God's will.

— the communion of saints, — the forgiveness of sins, — the resurrection of the body, — and the life everlasting. Amen.

See 1 Corinthians 15. —

Life after death. We don't know what it's like. We trust God in life and death. See Romans 14:8.

* Traditional use includes the words, "He descended into hell."
** means universal

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Questions:

- ♥ How is the Apostles' Creed a statement of faith?

- ♥ Based on the Apostles' Creed, what can you say about our faith?

The Nicene Creed⁸

This creed was first formulated at the First Ecumenical Council, held at Nicea, located in what is now Turkey, in 325, as a response to the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ. It was revised at the Second Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople in 381 as a response to the Macedonian heresy, which denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Look at the Nicene Creed shown below and answer the following questions.

Questions:

- ♥ What are some differences between the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed?

- ♥ What are the similarities between the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed?

- ♥ How does either creed help you explain your faith?

⁸ Based on <https://carm.org/nicene-creed>

date: AD. 381

THE NICENE CREED

not many gods

Creator of everything, not just "things"

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

Nehemiah 9:6-15

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, *Jesus is unique.* eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; *See John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-17.* through him all things were made. *One with the Father, divine. See John 14:7,9. and Colossians 2:9.*

Emphasizes that Jesus was truly divine

See Philippians 2:5-11. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. *shares human experience of suffering and death*

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

Jesus triumphed over sin and death and shares in God's sovereignty.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. *God's final victory will come.*

God's reign or rule

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. *Trinity reaffirmed*

We believe in the one holy catholic* and apostolic church. *rooted in the life and witness of apostles as reported in the New Testament*

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. **means universal*

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen. *life after death*

One baptism is sufficient, since God's claim and love are permanent.

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Grounding in Scripture and *The Discipline*⁹

In order to understand and appreciate our distinctiveness as a denomination, we must first appreciate and celebrate the faith we share with other denominations. Understanding the basic core of faith affirmations prepares us to comprehend more fully and to appreciate more deeply the particular theological emphases of the United Methodist Church. The following is a summary of those beliefs we hold (not only within our faith tradition but with other Christians):

- ♥ **The Triune God** - God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit; three persons, one God
- ♥ **Salvation in and Through Jesus Christ** - God has taken the initiative in and through Jesus Christ to restore the divine image in humanity and to bring the whole of creation into harmony with the nature and purposes of God. In life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, God did everything necessary to overcome all that separates us from God.
- ♥ **God's Love Experienced the Holy Spirit** - John Wesley understood the Holy Spirit as God's personal presence in the heart and will of the believer and in the Spirit-filled community and its sacraments.
- ♥ **The Universal Church** - As the body of Christ, the church consists of those whose lives are being transformed into the image of God, those who possess the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-11). As the church, we long for the coming of God's reign in the world. While waiting faithfully for God's final victory, we rejoice in the promise of the everlasting life that conquers death and evil.
- ♥ **The Present and Future Reign of God** - The kingdom of God, according to the Bible and church tradition, is the realm of God's reign. Wherever God's will is done, the kingdom or reign of God is present. The reign of God is both a present reality and a future hope. God's vision for the world and the human family remains only dimly perceived and inadequately lived, but the church lives in hopeful anticipation of the new heaven and the new earth that will conform to the image of Christ.

⁹ Carder, Kenneth L.; *Who Are We? Doctrine, Ministry, and Mission of the United Methodist Church, Leader's Guide*; The United Methodist Publishing House, 1998; Nashville, TN (Based on Session 3, *We Share This Faith*)

- ♥ **Authority of Scripture in Matters of Faith** - When the Bible is taken literally or figuratively as God's Word, it demands to be taken seriously by all who would know God. Its authority in matters of science and history may be questioned, but its authority in matters of faith has remained firm throughout the church's history.
- ♥ **Oneness of the Church** - The universal church is the body of Christ. Paul's image of the oneness of the church is found in Romans and Corinthians. In Romans 11, Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree, with the church being a branch grafted into the tree. The analogy remains relevant for the contemporary church. The church is a tree and the various denominations or communions comprise its branches.

Questions:

- ♥ What are some words or phrases that represent beliefs shared across denominational lines?
- ♥ What are some beliefs that might be particular to followers of John Wesley? (Hint: types of grace)

Faith¹⁰

Faith was one of the most important theological concepts for John Wesley, as well as one of the most complex. Over time, Wesley came to think of faith in different ways, all of which are important. Early on, he thought of it primarily as believing the truth of Christian revelation. He never gave up that idea, but through his own experience of the grace of God, he realized that faith also involves trust and confidence. In fact, having this trust in God became so important that eventually he began to consider faith as the evidence of God's love that could secure our trust and confidence. Because faith can have different dimensions, Wesley began to talk of "degrees" of faith to indicate how people could grow in the way they grasped the meaning of God's love for them. The highest degree of faith was coupled with such assurance of God's love that a person was completely filled with love in return.

Questions:

- ♥ Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**. What is the result of faith?

- ♥ What does the "full assurance of faith" mean to you?

- ♥ What does the statement "faith can have different dimensions" imply or mean to you?

¹⁰ The Wesley Study Bible (NRSV), Abingdon Press, Nashville (page 1493). Wesleyan Core Term: Faith

Faithful Living¹¹

Faithful living is a series of choices, decisions, commitments, and changes that can move us toward God. Each choice that leads to life, love, God, and neighbor repeats in us a measure of Abraham's faith, who by faith "set out, not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8). To follow Christ, to commit to marriage, to parent a child, to serve a stranger, and to respond to a vocation, move us in trust to places we cannot now see. Faithful living is edgy, unpredictable, adventuresome, and scary. Wesley established faith communities with mentors, peers, friends, and fellow journeyers to help people move forward daily.

Questions:

- ♥ Read **Hebrews 11:8-22**. How does Abraham's faith encourage your faith?

- ♥ Who in your life has encouraged you to "faithful living"?

- ♥ Who can you mentor or encourage to live a more faithful life?

¹¹ The Wesley Study Bible (NRSV), Abingdon Press, Nashville (page 1494). Life Application
Topic: Faithful Living