

*Please read the three Creeds on the insert*

Let us pray: Open our eyes and hearts God of sacred story.  
Speak to us through these words,  
show us the way and give us strength to live in faith. Amen.

The Nicene Creed was written, in 325 CE, at the Council of Nicaea by a group of bishops gathered there to come to some kind of agreement about what was meant by God-in-three-persons. The bishops were invited by Emperor Constantine to, hopefully, end the controversy between the bishop of Alexandria, and Arius, a prestigious and well-liked parish priest in the city of Alexandria.

The controversy was about two different understandings that was meant by the phrase, Word of God. “Word” in Greek = “logos” ...also interpreted as the Son of God, as in, “the Word Became Flesh”

The bishop of Alexandria believed Word/(Jesus) was Divine,  
and so could Not be created by God.

While Arius believed that before anything else was made,  
Word/(Jesus) Was created by God.

The ideas that the members of the Council of Nicaea were trying to express weren't easy to understand. There was a lot of discussion and argument and fist waving for many days, until the bishops finally had a formula they could all agree on;  
“God ....., Son ....., Holy Spirit”

This writing was bound to become an important piece of Christian Doctrine. It was, and is, intended to describe the reality of the living God -in relationship to the gospel. The language sounds awkward, and even technical to our ears today.

But the Apostle's Creed (150 CE) is also problematic for some people;  
the Nicene Creed wants to deny Jesus was truly GOD, while  
the Apostle's Creed wants to deny Jesus was truly MAN...so which one is right?

Some question they were arguing about; (and we might, too)

If Jesus is God's son, and Mary's son.....does that make him **human** only? **divine** only?  
Can he be both?

Does the word “begotten” make a difference? What about the word “created”?

In the words of the Christmas carol, “O Come All Ye Faithful” -  
*“God of God, light of light,  
lo, he abhors not the virgin’s womb;  
very God, begotten, not created....”*

Written 175 years apart says Christians were still struggling with language and meaning to better explain their faith, (or for political reasons?) Do we still do the same today? Looking at both of the creeds, is there something that you agree with, or don’t like? Is it just a matter of language? A matter of beliefs.

These Creeds will always be inadequate in trying to offer suitable images and concepts to the church as a whole. In the United Church of Canada, we have revised our Creed several times, trying to reflect a modern understanding of the Trinity.

Trinity Doctrine is not a “revealed (by God) doctrine.” It’s not in the Bible, (The Lord’s Prayer). It wasn’t written on stone tablets. It’s the result of many years of reflection by the church to attempt to explain the gospel message, and the church’s belief in it. It’s the church’s effort to try and give a clearer understanding of the free grace announced in the gospel, and experienced in Christian faith.

Today we are reminded that we always worship God as -One in Three, and Three in One. We praise God;  
we remember the redeeming work of Jesus;  
and we invite the Holy Spirit into our midst.

Though we may never make sense of it, -that’s where Faith comes in, we have the gift to be able to explore our faith, to ask the hard questions....to ask;  
~ can this doctrine help our faith in any way...or continue to obscure and confuse most of us?  
~ and importantly, does the language “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” fit our own beliefs? And it’s also very important to remember that of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is a female image....often called Wisdom/Sophia.

But today is not a day to try and figure out the mathematical equation of “three in one”. It’s a day to acknowledge the faith and hope that The Creator pours into our lives through Christ and the Holy Spirit/Wisdom/She  
It’s a day to live in the poetry the scripture offers us, and to be reminded of the many names and images of God.

But, before all of this “Trinity Doctrine” there was creation, itself. The other reading for today, the passage from Genesis chapter one, says-  
“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,...”

For most Christians, the Bible is ‘God’s word’ and contains his law. God created the world, giving humans a special place and purpose in it. Christians believe that the Trinity was present at the creation of the world. God the father is the Creator, but Genesis 1 shows that the Spirit also had a role; the Spirit of God was hovering over the water. And God said, ‘Let there be light.’ and there was light (*Gen. 1:2-3*)

The Gospel of John also describes the role of the Son of Man (Jesus), referring to him as the “Word”-

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.  
He was with God in the beginning.  
Through him all things were made.”

There are various interpretations of the creation story. Christians have different beliefs, depending on their denomination and on their personal beliefs:

- **Literal** - Some Christians interpret the creation stories in Genesis literally. For these Christians, God dictated the Bible, the events it describes happened exactly as written and everything in it is completely true.
- **Inspirational** - Other Christians believe that the Bible was inspired by God, but that the text was created by people. Because people make mistakes, there could be human errors in the text of the Bible. Therefore, the stories can be interpreted in many ways. For example, these Christians might question the length of a ‘day’ in Genesis, so the word ‘day’ could actually mean an era.
- **Metaphorical** – and there are those Christians who believe that the stories are metaphors or symbolic descriptions. These Christians accept scientific theories about the origins of the universe, such as the Big Bang theory.

But..... “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.  
The Spirit was suspended over the water.”

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” (*2Cor.13:13*)

This was the benediction of a long and painful letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. We can feel the anguish in his words. He is doubting the call of God for his life. He is comparing himself to the “super-apostles” who have appeared in Corinth claiming to have all these super-powers. He has returned to Corinth in the middle of the conflict.

He's feeling vulnerable, and the congregation is about to divide itself.  
He thinks his ministry has been all for nothing.

During our own time of exhaustion, uncertainty (still), and worry, do we feel it's all been for nothing? Is this virus ever going away? Or will it be here forever, and that's just the way it is? And what about the church, our church? Like Paul, do we feel hopeless, vulnerable, maybe? Will we ever worship like we used to? What if there is no church to come to? (Paul's biggest fear.) ....what is 'church'?

So Paul invites the struggling congregation to look carefully at themselves and their Faith. Can they do something different? To make things better for the church, and their faith in him, as messenger, and in God?

The super-apostles have threatened Paul's authority, and his reputation has begun to slip. He says (in desperation, I think), "Listen to me....this is the third time I've come to you....." (13:1) He asks them again, "Don't you realize that Christ is in you(us)?"

Right there is our hope. We keep forgetting that God/Jesus/Spirit loves us. It's tempting to feel sorry for ourselves ...to give up....

"I'm getting out of this house, I just can't stay inside anymore... the loneliness, the boredom, not being with my family. I want to bump into someone with my grocery cart and say, "Oh, Excuse me!" and have them smile back and say. "That's okay."  
And I'm tired of saying, "We'll be together- but apart" We're not together.

Paul writes, "We pray to God that you won't do anything wrong, (and not that we've faced the 'test'), but that you do the right thing." He asks them/us to examine our faith, and what is truth. The truth is God loves us, never leaves us, and never will.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." (2Cor.13:13)

Let us pray: Holy Three,  
we thank you for coming to us in Jesus,  
we thank you for coming to us in the written word,  
so many written words and yet, none of them seem adequate.  
Be near us as we begin another week, comforted and determined.  
Amen.