

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Romans 10:11-15

¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Title Slide

Slide 1

Last week we... talked about our vow “To **confess** Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole **trust** in his grace, and promise to **serve** him as Lord.”

Slide 2

Before that we talked about the 4 Rs of turning away from the world’s ideals – in order to choose God’s way.

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Today, I will encourage you to “Choose to Represent the Way” (which are the Promises 4 and 7)

Slide 4

As Christians, we are given a covenant family, the church, and a family album of stories, the Bible. We commit ourselves to live with both. The fourth and the seventh vows address To remain faithful members of Christ’s holy church and serve as Christ’s representatives in the world & To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

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Remain faithful, represent, receive

The church is our family, and vows help keep families together. Face it—life is tough and those closest to us can be exasperating; there are many reasons to give up on relationships. That’s why marriages and families are built on the foundation of vows:

...for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do us part ...

Like all other vows, marriage vows themselves are founded on the grace of God and we believe grace makes it possible not only to keep them, but also to flourish in them. When we remain faithful, we represent God’s best and we receive God’s blessing. We need a similar vow to keep us committed to the church.

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Some will point out that the church can be hypocritical and short sighted. Others will remind us that the church has hurt people, sometimes quite seriously. They are right on both counts. The church is sinful, yet also full of grace. Some folks will insist that they feel closer to God sitting by a mountain stream than they do in the church sanctuary on Sunday morning. Who can argue that point? There are some that might want to substitute “on the couch” for the “mountain stream” piece, but the sentiment remains. Some religious and spiritual expressions

require no one else but myself and my private ruminations, but the Christian faith is not one of those things. The God we read about in the Scriptures works with families, as imperfect and disappointing as they may be. God works with groups of disciples and churches, with the twelve, the seventy, and the one hundred and twenty (Luke 9:1-6, Luke 10: 1-12, Acts 1: 15-26).

If you want a God who doesn't work in and through groups, then you'll have to find another narrative than the one we have been given. God is one, but God is three Father, Son, and Spirit. The God we read about in the Old and New Testaments insists that you commit to God's covenant people, warts and all. What are the benefits of such a commitment? The primary benefit is the presence of the living Christ. Indeed, he promises that we will greet him in the midst of the faithful—"...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20).

Slide 7

The church continues to insist that our hearts are warmed as we hear the Scriptures read and proclaimed (Luke 24: 32), that the Risen Christ is known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24: 35). Indeed, the mystery of the Risen Christ is present in the midst of my sisters and brothers. They hear my confession and proclaim God's forgiveness. They embrace me, they laugh and cry with me, and God heals me in and through all of that. My brothers and sisters know my shortcomings, and so they keep me honest, but they also know my potential, and so they call forth my gifts. They share their heritage and their wisdom and give me people to teach. I need their commitment to me, and they need me as well. Our life together in the church involves us in commitment to continue wrestling with the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments.

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As the church is a family given to us, warts and all, so these Scriptures are given to us. Again, one can think of the Scriptures as a family album, an uncensored album at that. The stories about the thieves and the adulterers have not been excluded. Sometimes, the rogues—like King David—are also the heroes. The Scriptures provide us with our foundational stories and we remind ourselves that our story as church and as members of it will not make sense unless we know the Scriptures and continue to reflect on them. Nevertheless, while each story helps us understand something about the covenant family, not all of them are central to our identity.

The Apostles Creed, which stands at the heart of the Service of the Baptismal Covenant, functions as an important organizing principle. Thus, when we invite baptismal candidates and confirmands to "join together in professing the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments," we respond with the Creed. In doing so, we follow a liturgical pattern with ancient roots. Using the Creed to answer the question about the Scriptures is a wise strategy, for it reminds us that the Scriptures are not primarily a list of rules for conduct, or principles about God, or promises to be redeemed, or even odd and tragic stories about flawed individuals and families. The Creed helps us understand what the church holds most important about the biblical narrative. The Scriptures witness to a God known in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God is Creator of all things. At the heart of the biblical narrative is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are given life in and through this Christ, and his ministry continues in the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such is the heart of the narrative. The Creed does not address every question. It does not tell us exactly what to do about international terrorism, nor does it tell us how to structure our health care system or do education reform. It says nothing about the proper age for baptismal candidates or the mode for baptizing them. It insists that Christ will come again, but does not say when or how. We should discuss these issues and others like them with our Bibles open and our minds engaged, and United Methodists commit themselves to doing such work. We should continue to take our questions to the Scriptures, even though such study often provides more questions than direct answers. Even as we have such discussions—and arguments—around the biblical views of life today, we should remember what lies at the heart of that narrative. That the Creed is proclaimed by most of the world's Christians reminds us that, despite our differences, there is a broad ecumenical consensus about the essential core of the church's proclamation.