

Blessing and honor, glory and power

Revelation 5:1-14

April 19, 2009

We have come to the end! We have come to the end of a journey we began just over seven months ago, on September 14, a journey exploring together the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ. We have discussed line by line this expression of what we believe.

This expression of what we believe! Our statement of faith describes a faith we hold in common. Faith is personal, but not private. Faith is personal because it comes from me; it is not put on me. But faith is not private. Our statement of faith describes how we understand ourselves in context, in relationship ... with God, with each other, and with all of creation. Our faith is a shared story that binds us together and gives us an identity and gives our lives direction.

Our statement of faith is not a test of faith. We are not doorkeepers, deciding who should get in and who should not. No, we are not the doorkeepers, but Jesus is the door! Jesus is the door and all are invited to come in. What matters is not so much the words themselves, but the One to whom they point!

Our statement of faith not a test of faith, but a testimony to faith, a witness to what we -- together -- have experienced of God and, on the basis of that shared experience, what we -- together -- know God to be like.

*We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father,
and to your deeds we testify:*

*You call the worlds into being,
create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.*

*You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness
and sin.*

*You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared
through prophets and apostles.*

*In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us and shared our common lot
conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.*

*You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.*

*You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.*

*You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.*

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.

Amen.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Is there any other way we could rightly end this statement of our faith? Could we end it any other way than with this exclamation of praise? Or would we rather finish reciting, finish hearing, the statement and then just say, "Oh ..."

You call the worlds into being! You create persons in your own image! In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, you have come to us and shared our common lot, reconciling the world to yourself! You promise to all who trust you, forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, and eternal life in your realm which has no end!

Oh ...

There are many things for which we -- each of us individually and all of us collectively -- rightly bear shame.

We rightly bear shame for our selfishness, for our narrow focus on our own needs and wants, for our failure to recognize our fundamental connection to each other, for our failure to understand that we are but one part of a much greater whole.

We rightly bear shame for our ignorance, for our failure to see what is right before our eyes, the wonder and beauty and goodness of all that God has made, and we rightly bear shame for our failure to hear God's clear call -- if only in conscience, but certainly too in words spoken and written -- God's clear call to a life of justice and love and mercy and peace.

And we rightly bear shame for our pride, for our refusal to acknowledge God or to obey God or to put God first in our lives because we want to be what we want to be and we want to do what we want to do, and nobody, not even God, is going to tell us who to be or what to do!

But of all the things for which we rightly bear shame, this to me is the most shameful ... that we can hear the story -- this astonishing, wonderful, most glorious story of the God who gives us life, who calls us and loves us and comes to us and reconciles us and makes us promises of extraordinary blessing -- that we can hear this story and say, "Oh ..."

Shame on us for our hard and cold hearts! Shame on us for our oh-so-sophisticated spirits! Shame on us for our rabid attention to things and our utter lack of attention to the one from whom all things come!

Shame on us for our foolish pride that lets us jump up and down, cheering wildly for a bunch of guys playing a silly game, while we sit unmoved, in silence, in the presence of ... God!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you!

Faith is a complicated passion. Like love, another complicated passion, faith is many things at once. It is composed of many different layers, many different strands of intention and emotion and thought and feeling all woven together.

Faith is an act of belief, a function of the mind. In faith, we acknowledge that certain things are true and we build our lives on the foundation of those things we hold to be true.

Faith is a choice, a function of the will. We choose one way over an other. We choose one God over all others. We commit ourselves to follow faithfully wherever Jesus leads.

Faith is a lifestyle, a function of our bodies and our spirits, a function of our whole selves. We give, we serve, we help, we love, we pray, we work, we do justice, we show mercy, we make peace.

Like love, faith is a complex, many-layered passion, but also, like love, in the end, it is very simple.

In the end, faith is simply this: Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you!

In the end, faith is simply this ... acknowledging who God is ... putting yourself in God's hands ... putting yourself at God's disposal ... simply being ... simply enjoying ... simply praising ...

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you!

And the wonder is: when we humble ourselves before God, when we offer ourselves in praise, when we set ourselves aside (set side what we want, what we choose, what matters to us) ... then our selves are not lost, but found!

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you!