

The Service for the Lord's Day is a service of Word and Sacrament. We gather in the presence of the risen Christ, who appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week to open the Scriptures and break bread. Following Christ's example, the Church proclaims the gospel through Word and Sacrament each Lord's Day.

An order of worship provides a meaningful pattern for this encounter with God. More than a sequence of actions, it shapes our faith over time, forming us as Christ's disciples.

The order of worship is rooted in Scripture, the traditions of the universal Church, and our Reformed heritage. Centered on Gathering, Word, Sacrament, and Sending, it keeps Word and Sacrament at the heart of the Church's life and worship.

Today, we are exploring one of the parts of worship that many of us who grew up in the church experienced almost every Sunday: the Affirmation of Faith.

So, what is an affirmation of faith? Let's begin with one from the formative days of Christianity. Perhaps some of you know the symbol and name of the fish, ICHTHUS. Let's watch a video about it.

[ICHTHYS: The Code That Connected Early Christians](#) video.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. An early, and apt, statement of faith.

In the churches of my youth, an affirmation of faith normally meant reciting the Apostles' Creed. Is that true for others? Perhaps some recited the Nicene Creed?

The Apostles' Creed was something we memorized in confirmation class and became the norm for rote recitation on Sunday mornings. Shall we, for old times' sake?

**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 Ghost  
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and  
buried.**

**He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into  
heaven and sitteth on 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 Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the  
forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

For some, I imagine that was comforting. For others, I suspect it may be cringe-worthy.

It is crafted with archaic language, to be sure. Our denominations have tried to update both the language and, somewhat, the content. In *The New Century Hymnal*, number 881, and *Glory to God*, page 17, you will find the Creed in modern language. Number 882 in *The New Century Hymnal* offers an alternate version that leans into inclusive language. You'll find the same treatment for the Nicene Creed in numbers 883–884 of *NCH*, and an updated version of the Nicene Creed on page 34 of *GtG*. Both hymnals also offer several modern statements of faith.

I have sermons I wrote and preached 10 years ago when LCPC did a survey of all the Creeds and Confessions found in the PC(USA)'s *Book of Confessions*. If anyone would like more background on any of these, I'd be happy to share those sermons.

One bit of wisdom I'll pull out of them is that the word "creed" comes from the Latin "credo" which means, "I give my heart to." Those who professed any of these declarations of faith were giving their heart to the service of Jesus Christ.

Saying a creed as an affirmation of faith is a beautiful thing. It helps us proclaim what we believe. But what matters even more is how we live that belief.

I am intrigued by the intersection of this topic and today's gospel reading. It might have been more fitting to choose Jesus' Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel, or one of the speeches offered in Acts by Peter or Paul, or snippets from the apostles' letters to the early churches.

Last Sunday, Amanda offered the children an adaptation of the adage that says, "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words." Today's lesson is an affirmation of faith *in action* — and from an unlikely, and frankly for the time, scandalous source!

Matthew sets the context beautifully. Jesus offers a sermonette that braids his wisdom with holiness codes, cleanliness laws, and common sense. He is challenging the culture of purity espoused by religious leaders, who judged people's fitness for the kin-dom of God by their eating practices.

Jesus teaches that what one eats doesn't determine what God thinks of someone, and that eating with clean or dirty hands doesn't defile a person. What matters is what is in the heart and what comes out of the mouth. Jesus' pointed words are directed at the judgmental words and attitudes of the religious leaders.

Then Matthew—or the Holy Spirit—does something completely unexpected: it puts Jesus under the microscope of his own proclamation.

Immediately after this teaching, Jesus moves into a region outside Jewish territory, identified by the cities of Tyre and Sidon. There, a Canaanite woman approaches Jesus and begs him to heal her daughter, who is possessed by a demon.

Jesus responds, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (v24)

Stinging words, to be sure. Jesus’ understanding that his *mission* is only to serve the Jews is mindblowing.

When we proclaim in the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus was “born of the Virgin Mary,” we profess Jesus’ full humanity. Here it is on full display. His conviction that he is called only to serve the “lost sheep of Israel” makes him blind to the confession of faith this woman makes when she approaches him: “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David...”

In those eight words, she has professed a deeper faith than many of the learned men of the religious establishment—and perhaps most of Jesus’ followers. This *foreigner and woman* has a remarkably complete understanding of who Jesus is, and she is willing to proclaim it.

She presses further: “Lord, help me.”

Shockingly, Jesus doubles down on his ethnic bias: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Was it not in his last proclamation that Jesus denounced the filth that comes from the mouth? Yet, here we find him debasing this woman with seemingly no remorse!

Not backing down, the woman offers her faith with the power of a fire-breathing dragon: “Yes, *Lord*, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” That statement, and her fierce advocacy for her daughter, finally unlock Jesus’ heart. He says to her, “Woman, great is your faith!” And, using his Lordly powers, he restores the woman’s daughter to her right mind.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.

We should all thank this unnamed Canaanite woman. She encourages us to be bold enough to call upon Jesus to remove the yoke of our burdens—and the burdens of those we love. She shows us what can happen if we call upon the power of Jesus in naked faith. And she illustrates the power of love for another, regardless of the risk to ourselves.

We can make all the declarations of faith in our worship services that we like. But it is not until we are willing to share our faith with another, especially when they need it, that our faith makes the greatest difference.

This made me wonder what the disciples and apostles learned from Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman.

I mentioned both Peter and Paul earlier. I believe Peter was the first disciple to share the faith with someone outside Judaism. In chapter 10 of Acts, Peter is led to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Peter receives a message from the Spirit of Christ telling him to go and share the good news. Peter still struggles over who is worthy to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but he learns in a dream that “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

Another lesson in human hubris. Sometimes we think we know whom God claims. Yet Peter finally comes to the ultimate truth: Jesus is Lord.

Listen to what he says to Cornelius' household and tell me it doesn't sound a bit like a creed:

34 So Peter said to them, "I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality – 35 rather, that any person of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. 36 This is the message God has sent to the people of Israel, the Good News of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ, who is Savior of all.

37 "You yourselves know what took place throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee with the baptism John proclaimed. 38 You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how Jesus went about doing good works and healing all who were in the grip of the Devil, because God was with him. 39 We are eyewitnesses to all that Jesus did in the countryside and in Jerusalem. Finally, Jesus was killed and hung on a tree, 40 only to be raised by God on the third day. God allowed the risen Christ to be seen, 41 not by everyone, but only by the witnesses who had been chosen beforehand by God — that is, by us, who ate and drank with Christ after the resurrection from the dead. 42 And Christ commissioned us to preach to the people and to bear witness that this is the one set apart by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Christ Jesus all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes has forgiveness of sins through this Name." (Acts 10:34-43)

At that, the Holy Spirit came upon those who heard and absorbed the word.

Remembering the story of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior is important. Affirmations of Faith help keep that story alive—as long as we give our hearts to the story and live our lives in a manner that reflects Christ's love.

As we consider the rightful place of such affirmations in our common worship, let us say them with a conviction that matters—and then let us live them.

Let us begin by uniting with the church in all times and places in confessing our faith with these words from our denominational statements of faith. *Will you please rise in body or in spirit:*

**ALL**        **In life and in death we belong to you, O God, Eternal Spirit,  
God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:  
You call the worlds into being and create us in your own image.  
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.  
With believers in every time and place,  
    we rejoice that nothing in life or in death  
    can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.**