

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
May 22, 2016**

**Various Verses**

**We Believe...A Remarkable Confession**

**Hymns: 195 – 194 – 334**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The sermon is over and the congregation is invited to rise to their feet. With one voice, those standing begin their recitation, speaking the words of the creed chosen for that day – the Nicene if there's communion; the Apostles' if there's not; the Athanasian if it's Trinity Sunday and the pastor is feeling nostalgic. The voices start strong, but soon settle into a monotonous rhythm. As the familiar words are repeated, a few minds begin to wander, a voice or two falls behind, the pastor even forgets whether he is saying the Apostles' or Nicene and fumbles between the two.

That familiarity breeds contempt is overly strong when it comes to our relationship with the creeds, but it can certainly hinder our appreciation of the opportunity we are given each service when the Confession of Faith rolls around. The words are archaic, going back almost 2,000 years. The confessions are oft-repeated, engraved into our minds. But the Creed is remarkable every time it is confessed. And may we on this Sunday where we celebrate the glory of our Triune God grow in our thanks for the Confessions upon which we stand as believers in the Church!

There is a natural attraction to defying reality. Just watch sometime how the simplest slight-of-hand trick captures a child's

attention. We are drawn to what seems impossible.

When we stand to confess our faith in the Triune God, we can stand in awe because the truly impossible happens. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he announced why that was the case: **"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).** It is impossible for a person, on their own, to make a confession of faith.

Scripture explains why in other places. It is impossible because of our sin which makes us dead and naturally incapable of any spiritual move toward God. It's impossible because of our stubbornness and pride which tell us that we can solve our problems on our own without relying solely on God's work done for us. It's impossible because of our reason which dismisses the idea that God could be Triune; that God could take on human flesh yet remain God; that perfect God would save sinful man by giving his Son on the cross as an atoning sacrifice. For so many reasons, it should be impossible for any of us to confess faith in what God has done.

Yet, every Sunday, we as individual Christians do the impossible. We each stand and say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty; I believe in Jesus Christ his Son; I believe in the Holy Spirit; I believe in the Triune God and the work done for me!" How does the impossible happen? The confession starts in our hearts, where the Holy Spirit does the miraculous: changing hearts darkened by sin to hearts filled with the Light of Christ's love. And it moves to our minds, where through the study of God's Word, we grow in what we know about our God and his work. And Paul says in Romans 10 that when we believe and know, the impossible will happen – we will confess. Paul writes: **"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: <sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with**

**your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”** (Ro 10:8–10). Not only do those words speak about the awesomeness of our confession, but they also speak to the importance of our confession. What a remarkable opportunity it is for each of us to stand before God and tell him and the world what we each believe. Every time we rise to our feet, it is remarkable that we confess at all.

But it is remarkable in another way as well. Philosophy is the study of human wisdom and thought. And if you’ve ever spent any time studying philosophy, then you have quickly realized how many and different are the thoughts and beliefs of mankind. What’s the phrase: “No two people are alike.” That two people might agree and be able to stand and confess together a common belief would seem to be impossible.

Yet, when it comes to our faith and beliefs as Christians, unity is encouraged. Paul said in Ephesians **“to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”** (Eph 4:3). God wants a church that is perfectly united, able to stand as one in their confession of what they believe about him and his Word.

Yet we know how often the church becomes divided. And that happens because unity is always being attacked. Keeping us from standing together and confessing together is at the heart of the devil’s work. And he does it by confusing and corrupting what we believe. And the apostles warned us about that work and how it would be done. In 1 John, we hear this warning, **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** From inside the church, deceivers would come and Paul warned of their effect in Romans 16 as he said, **“watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.”** (Ro 16:17).

Divisions and obstacles to unity were there from the very start, stirred up by people in the church. And it makes it seem impossible that sinful men would ever be able to stand and confess together.

But despite the devil’s workings and our natural inklings to be individuals in our thoughts and beliefs, the remarkable happens as we stand as one and join in confessions that have united Christians since the first century. These confessions have been pressed by persecution. They have been attacked by false teachers. Yet, they stand as the foundation of the Church, and the unity which they give to us is a gift from God.

And that unity is a gift from God. The psalmist wrote **“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”** (Ps 133:1). When we are able to stand in church and confess together, never fail to ponder what you are doing in that moment. With heart and mouth, you are confessing a bond that unites you with Peter and Paul, Augustin and Athanasius, Luther and every Christian that has stood for their faith... Every time we recite our Creed, it is remarkable that we confess together.

Finally, it is remarkable what we confess has been done. Today is Trinity Sunday. Taking place every year after the Festival of Pentecost, it is an opportunity to look back at the three great festivals we have celebrated in the last six months. In Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, we see with great clarity all that our Triune God has done to bring salvation to us.

It began with the Father who chose to love us from eternity and make us the recipients of his plan of salvation. It centered on the Son, Jesus Christ, who came to this world as true God and true man to be our perfect Savior from sin as he lived, died and rose. It finished in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament has called us to faith, and now strengthens and keeps us in that faith.

All of that work is made more remarkable because it was done for you and me and every other person in this world; people who are corrupted by sin; people who continue to live in sin on a daily basis. Yet, this work of our Triune God stands; done for all! And each Creed used by our church stands as a testament to our Triune God and all that God which has done to accomplish our salvation. It is remarkable when we stand and confess as a group of believers what has been done.

More than a laboring tradition, our congregational recitation of the Creed is a remarkable event every time it takes place. It is remarkable that any of us confess at all. It is remarkable that we confess together. It is remarkable what we confess has been done. May we treasure the God-given opportunity we have each time we are invited to speak those words: "We believe". Amen.