The journey to Faith

As some of you may know, on Friday evening we found out that Katrina and her family have been exposed to Covid 19 and are self-isolating. They are all fine but of course cannot be with us today.

We had already selected the hymns, the readings and the bulletins were ready to print. The message was “Afraid to Ask” and just as the message suggested I was “afraid to ask” Mark what the plan was.

In his wisdom Mark replied, “Rob I have faith you will be just fine”.

So, with my faith being tested on such short notice I thought

about the wise words of Mark (the book of Mark not Mark H.) in which he tells the story of the disciples not understanding the words of Jesus but being afraid to ask.

It seemed appropriate therefore to concentrate on another part of our Worship Service that has helped me on my Journey to Faith.

The Journey to Faith

About 4 years ago I was returning home to Owasso from Montreal Canada. We had recently moved to Owasso from Pennsylvania and we had found FPCO. However, I was still working, commuting weekly from Owasso to Philadelphia and occasionally overseas. On this trip I was just wrapping up a project in Canada and I had an early flight home. My flight would take me from Montreal to Philly, on to Charlotte and then Tulsa. I was expecting to be home about 2pm. I was staying at the airport and the hotel was actually in the same terminal as my flight and so I could see my gate from where I was having coffee. No rush I thought I will let the line move through before I go down. But the line didn’t move! It was 6.30am the flight was at 7am when the dreaded sign went up. Flight Cancelled!

The crowd in the lobby below began to get agitated as everyone wanted the same thing, to get rebooked on the next flight. My text came through from my frequent flyer club, “flight cancelled, call to rebook”. So, from the comfort of my breakfast table with plenty of coffee I called in to rebook. After lots of checking by a very nice agent the bottom line was not good. I could wait for the same flight tomorrow or take a 5pm flight that would get me home at midnight. As today was Friday, I chose the latter.

Having already checked out of the hotel I was now faced with spending all day in the airport. So, no problem I thought, I would call Nora at a more reasonable time to let her know what was going on, check emails and then get to that report that I was in the middle of.

My emails were sorted by “business” and “personal” and so I normally read the few personal emails first before I got into the plethora of business emails. It was Friday November 3rd 2017.

*October 31, 2017. From Pastor Natalie Bell – last weeks Sermon.*

I had missed Church the previous Sunday as Sunday was my travel day to Philly so I could be at work for Monday morning. This had been my routine for some years, Sunday was a travel day, no time for Church. Something that I hoped my looming retirement would change.

I opened the email and read the sermon.

I re-read the sermon.

The message was “giving” and a calmness came over me.

Pastor Natalie reminded me, at the end of the message that previous sermons could be found in the web site.

I checked into the website and began reading the previous sermons. I cannot remember how many I read but before long it was lunch time and I realized that I had reading sermons all morning.

I sent an email to Natalie saying how comforting it was to be able to read the sermons on my travels and how wonderful it was to feel part of this Church of Christ even if I could not be there. Even in the middle of lonely far-off airport I could be connected to my faith. But that made me wonder………..

What is my faith?

Is it something that we desire to have, like a destination, or an objective?

Is it something that drives us towards that destination, like fuel or energy?

Is it something we are born with or the result of a search?

Every week in our Church we remind ourselves of what we believe, what our faith is based on. We begin reciting that statement of faith, the Apostles Creed, with………………..

“Christian what do you believe”?

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, the Apostles’ Creed summarizes foundational Christian beliefs. It has been used both as a statement of faith and in worship by many denominations, including the Presbyterian Church. This creed is called the Apostles' Creed not because it was produced by the Apostles themselves but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. More than any other Christian creed, it may justly be called an ecumenical symbol of faith.

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,………………..*

The first thing you notice from that opening is how Trinitarian it is. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And then you begin to see that the focus of the Apostles’ Creed is on the headline facts of Jesus’ earthly life, atoning death, and resurrection and ascension. ………

*born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven,*

But the creed isn’t just about what Jesus has done in the past. It also considers the present situation of Jesus and looks ahead to what Jesus will do in the future. The present is there in the next line:…………………

*and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;*

John Calvin explains what “sitting at the right hand of the Father” means. It means that “Christ was invested with lordship over heaven and earth, and solemnly entered into possession of the government committed to him—and that he not only entered into possession once for all, but continues in it.” That means that Jesus rules over all things today and will one day be seen by everyone to be ruling over all things. That’s why the creed continues:

*from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

“The quick” here simply means “the living.” In other words, when Jesus returns, He will judge all those who are living at the time of His return and all those who have already died, across the entire span of human history.

Then, as it closes, the Apostles’ Creed moves from what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do. It becomes a reminder of what these historical realities actually mean for you and I, as believers. It says this:…………

*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.*

Here at First Presbyterian Church of Owasso, we stand together as people of Faith and say the Apostles’ Creed every week. And as we do, I’m conscious I stand with other people of Faith across the country, across the seas, and across the centuries. Have there ever been words that have united people for two thousand years as the Apostles’ Creed has?

But is it as simple as that?

Does the Apostles Creed define my faith?

If I can recite the creed does that mean I have found my faith?

Translated from the original Greek, the word "faith" can also be found in editions of the New Testament, as "belief", "faithfulness", or "trust".

As Christians we may recognize different **degrees of faith** when we encourage each other to strive to develop, grow, or deepen our faith. But can we measure faith?

There is no “faith scale” there is no “faith measure”. We cannot see it or hear it or smell it? so how do we know when we truly are faithful?

Romans 5:1-2, says Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.

Romans 1:17, says: For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

As we become members of the Presbyterian Church, we are asked to make a public profession of faith, be baptized, or reaffirm our faith if already baptized.

My journey to faith started when I was born into The Church of England. The Anglican Church in England. I was Christened (baptized) in the Methodist “Chapel”, we called all denominations, other than The Church of England and Catholic, “Chapels”. Almost like they were “less than a Church” or were only “2 year schools”. As a young boy I sang in the choir at the 12th century church where my parents were married, and married Nora in her 12th century parish church. However, I never asked myself what I believed. I never attended Church regularly, and I never questioned my faith. As I got older Sunday became my travel day, until I retired. We moved to Owasso, found First Presbyterian, I traveled to Canada, my flight was cancelled, and my faith revealed. I say revealed as I believe it was there all the time, just waiting for the opportunity to present itself. When I got back to Owasso we joined First Presbyterian.

I have learned that the Journey to Faith is different for everyone.

I believe faith is a motivator. It’s what gets you out of bed in the morning. It’s what brings you to Church every week. It’s what moves you to live Christian values. It’s what motivates us to take that first step on our journey to faith.

I believe faith a sustainer. It provides energy to keep us going when all around us seems to be crumbling. Our faith is what sustains us when the journey to faith gets tough. It becomes like breathing, a necessity.

I believe faith is a comforter. We need to be comfortable that on our journey to faith, when we reach our destination of understanding our faith, we are comforted.

Whatever stage we are all on, in our journey to faith, when we get there, when we have arrived, when we are comforted that we have found our faith, turn around!

You may find that others on the journey are still travelling, have not arrived and may need your help.

Maybe we can be comforted with these words:…………..

*But this I know, he shelters me from stormy sea,*

*He holds me in his hands my binds unswathe*

*My heart my soul, are his without his stern decree*

*Deep is my trust, complete my love and strong my faith.*

In the devotional, Streams in the Desert it says:

Passive faith accepts the word as true, but never moves.Active faith begins the work to do, and thereby proves.Passive faith but praises in the light, when sun doth shine.
Active faith will praise in darkest night-- Which faith is thine?

And with that question, all God’s people said*…………*Amen