

SUNDAY October 26, 2025 “Shouting out Faithfulness”

Joel 2: 23-32 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 Luke 18:9-14

What do you believe about God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit? What is in your hearts and minds when the question is asked- who is God to you? How would you answer this question? The Bible shares the stories of faithful and unfaithful people who lived followed God, walked away and then later returned to live His way. Many of these stories we have heard before as they tell the decisions others made about who God was going to be in their lives.

When the people whom Moses had lead from slavery in Egypt were preparing to enter the Promised Land, Joshua challenged them when he stated in Joshua 24:14-15: *“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your father served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

The people chose to follow God’s teachings for many generations but often there were times when they questioned who God was in their lives just as we do today. Joel heard these questions and reminded the people that God is in the midst of Israel, and that the Lord am/ is your God and there is no other. No other God.

Yet as we see ourselves in the last quarter of the year 2025, we know that people around the world have turned away from God and followed their own paths and even their own gods (small g) or things that are elevated to the highest importance in a person's life. This often includes money, possessions, power, fame, pleasure and sex, self-worship (narcissism), and even things like jobs or family when they take precedence over one's core values. These are considered negative because they distract people from a relationship with God and often leads to a spiritual void.

So it is not surprising that through the ages people wondered about how one might describe God and how to share what their faith entails- that is what do we believe about God, Father, Son and Spirit. Over one hundred years ago, while the leaders were striving to bring together a national Church, it is the faith statements which called people together to discern what this new church would reflect. It was not a daunting task as one might think, because since the establishment of the church there have been leaders who sought answers to this very question. What do we as Christians believe about God? And how do we understand God even today? We must go back over 1700 years ago, in 325 when a special gathering of a council of Christian bishops convened in the Bithynian city of Nicaea (now İznik, Turkey) by the Roman

Emperor Constantine I. The purpose of this gathering was to have consensus in the church through an assembly representing all Christendom. Over 200 bishops from the known world were present and during deliberations, the relationship of Jesus as God's Son and being divine as well as human was discussed along with Jesus' relationship to God the Father. This led to the early sections of what is known as the Nicene Creed. Also decided was when Christians around the world would observe Easter being separated from the Jewish Passover observances, and what might be included in what would become known as the Bible. 1700 years ago. It took time for the words to be finalized but this Nicene Creed is still a part of church faith statements (found at 920 VU). What is significant also is that this faith statement reminds us that "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen."

Why is this significant? Because when we welcome people into God's family, the church we must remember that the Church is not contained in this one building or any building, but is comprised of the people who believe now because of influences and experiences of those in the past. Timothy is told by Paul that the faith he has was learned and believed from one generation to another. He learned well from his family and was now ready to share the Jesus' story with others. This is the same for us because God continues to inspire and equips those who believe to do the many tasks required within and outside of the established church.

Paul however says that he too kept the faith once Jesus changed him. He did not believe and persecuted those who did believe in Jesus. Yet when his life was transformed, he was given the strength to proclaim to others what he professed in faith. And in his life's work, he was able to tell this good news of Christ Jesus, the hope of eternal life to all Gentiles. Along with this his faith pointed to God who was and is to receive the glory. Faithfulness.. Paul had it big time.

But what about you? What does it mean today to be faithful to God? I'm not talking about whether you are tempted to do go against God's teachings at all but just what does it mean to be focused on God- knowing Jesus and feeling the Spirit of God in one's heart?

When we look at the story Jesus taught of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector no doubt the Pharisees in the crowd who heard him would have been angry at Jesus. After all he puts the Pharisee a member of a Jewish sect known for strict observance of religious law and tradition into the story as one of two men who go to the temple to pray. In contrast to this religious leader, is a tax collector who on the whole were known to cheat others out of their hard-earned money, often pocketing the extra money they paid to the state.

The Pharisee is standing by himself looking up to the ceiling of the temple and gives an eloquent and powerful oration about himself. He is supposedly in prayer to God when he states, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of all my income." The Pharisee speaks of his own righteousness. Does he believe in God? Yes as he is a religious leader and probably experienced many tests and interviews to be called a Pharisee. Yet he highlights himself as being above others and names a tax collector whom he lists as an example of sin.

Jesus' story continues. The tax collector standing far off, looks down to the floor, beats his breast and says: "God be merciful to me a sinner." The tax collector knew himself to have sinned and cries out for mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus point is made when he says that it is the tax collector who goes home justified rather than the other. For he humbled himself in faith testifying himself as a sinner, and sought mercy and forgiveness.

Faithfulness-- they were both men of faith. They both believed and lived out their lives as children of God, and as God's people. Yet Jesus points out what it meant for justification of the tax collector to be forgiven.

This forgiveness of sins is an essential part of our faith and who we are as a church. This is why we share prayers of confession and seek God's assurance of forgiveness and this has been a part of our Creedal statements for over 1700 years!

As we welcome new members into the church family of Glenwood United, we celebrate that they have come to affirm what they have been taught years ago and now desire to live out and serve God in this place. It is exciting, because as they make their promises we may renew ours to live out the mission and ministry of Christ's church. IF we are unsure of what this means, we turn to A New Creed.

We are called to be the Church: To celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

So we must ask how might we live this out together? Through faith in God- Father, Son and Spirit. Because God's Spirit is with us and will always be upon us as we love others and live for Christ throughout all of our days! We just need to let God's Spirit guide and breathe on us renewing us and our lives each day.

PRAYER

God breath on us all as we renew our faith in you. Remind us of the cloud of witnesses who have lived and died and now are with you. Enable us to be faithful to our promises and what it is that we are each called to do as members of this church family. As members of this Church lead by Jesus Christ our Saviour. For it is in and through Christ we have faith and hope now and always. Amen.

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