

Heart of Worship: Confess with Your Mouth What You Believe with Your Heart!

A sermon based on Romans 10:8-11

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What do you stand for? An apt question to ask, especially right now, in the thick of election season. What do you really stand for?

And right now, not just what do you stand for...we also want to know what these candidates really stand for. That's a little more difficult, wouldn't you say? It seems it's hard to find out what true position these candidates hold when it comes to so many different topics. Don't you agree it would be more helpful to get every individual candidate in a room by yourself, where you could lock the door, maybe administer a truth serum, but definitely just speak candidly, and pretty much tell them, "Cut the baloney! No toing party lines! Where are you, really, on this issue?"...that you'd be able to confidently say, "I'm with him/her!"

In doing that, would we see vastly different candidates?

What if it were you? Is what you confess with your mouth what you truly believe with your heart?

Today, in our worship, we are focusing on the confession of faith. Now, this is different from the confession we talked about a few weeks ago. This isn't the same as confession and absolution, where you confess/admit your sinfulness before God, repent of it, and trust in his full and free forgiveness. No, this is the part of worship where we confess and declare what it is we truly believe...our faith in our triune God and what he has done for us.

And we do that with our creeds. We have three of them, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed (maybe not quite as familiar as the other two, but we do use it once a year on Trinity Sunday; it's a bit longer). With these creeds we simply confess our Christian faith (that word creed comes from the Latin word, *credo*, which means, "I believe"). You see, our faith is not a feeling or an opinion; it is trust based on absolute truth, saving truth, historical truth found in the unerring Word of God and what he has done for us.

Now, I'll admit, this is probably the most redundant part of worship, but don't be fooled. This confession of faith is a beautiful thing. Here with the creeds, we get to give expression with our lips to the faith in our God which lives in our hearts as we give the reason for the hope we have. The confession we speak unites us with believers throughout the ages; it unites us with believers around the world. It's like the chant of the Church...of Team Jesus. A much greater cry than that of Team Hillary or Team Trump...of Team Black Lives Matter or Team All Lives Matter.

But, as much as the confession of faith here in worship is something we do together as a group, it's equally as much about you, the individual, making your personal confession of faith as well.

So now, the tables are turned, the mike is pointed in your face, and the light is shining on you. What do you believe?

You know, years ago it was taboo to talk about religion, politics, money (and other hot-button or personal/sensitive issues) when at work or out in public. Not so much anymore, right? I spent time with some shut-ins this past week, and one of them spent the first 15-20 minutes talking about disappointment in our government - local, state, and federal. I'm sure if I were to ask most of you what your thoughts are on one of the candidates in the upcoming election, you'd have just as much to say. Again, not so taboo anymore, is it?

Unless it's religion. While a lot of people out there have no problem talking about their religious views these days, it seems more often than not, we're a little more hesitant to do so. Unless that's just me. But I'm guessing it's not.

But again, what do you believe? How comfortable are you with that question? How comfortable are you with answering that question?

Or are you unsure? Well, I kind of got the basics down. I believe in Jesus, the Son of God...does that make him God's Son, or is he really God, too? I can't remember. Or, Jesus paid for my sins by dying on the cross, but there's something I have to do, right? I have to accept his forgiveness, or I have to make a decision to believe in him first, don't I? Or, I'm a little fuzzy on what God's Word says about the social issues of today, like homosexuality, divorce, living together outside of marriage, abortion, or church related issues, like infant baptism or close communion or the Trinity or fellowship issues...things where either you've forgotten or you just don't know what you really believe...what God's Word teaches?

Which probably makes you unready or unprepared to confess, right? Well, if I'm not completely sure what I believe, I'm certainly not comfortable with confessing that faith to others. Especially with those who are so out-spoken with their religious views, I don't want to look like a fool when I can't articulate mine, so changing the topic is usually the more appealing option.

Or maybe it just comes down to you being unwilling to confess your faith in Jesus. I don't want to look like or be labeled as one of those Jesus freaks, so I'm not going to say anything. To preserve my reputation, to keep the peace at work, in my friendships, or any other of my relationships, I've made the decision I'm not going to confess my faith and let others know what I believe.

And Jesus says, **"Whoever acknowledges (confesses) me before [others], I will acknowledge [them] before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before [others], I will disown [them] before my Father in heaven."** And here, in our verses, Paul writes, **"Anyone who trusts in [Jesus] will never be put to shame."**

It's so easy to be guarded...with our thoughts, with our feelings, even with our faith. But what a shame when we're not sure or not ready or not willing to stand up and confess our faith in Jesus and let others know what we believe. What a shame when the passion we have for our political views or our social views surpasses that of the passion we should have for Jesus.

God, forgive us for the times we've been unsure, unready, unwilling to confess you, and even more so when we've been that way in here, amongst fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

And he does.

Do you remember Peter's confession from our gospel today? Jesus asked him who Peter thought he was, and Peter said, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** His confession? Simple...sweet...saving.

You see, that short confession is packed with meaning for you and me. The God we believe in...the God we have? He's the Christ, the God-man, God who can down to earth and became fully human for you and me, who experienced temptation like you and me, but, unlike you and me, was perfect. That's the God we believe in and confess.

The Son of God – God himself – who not only lived for us but who took his perfection to the cross so that he could exchange it for our sinfulness and through his death make us pure and holy in his sight...that's the God we believe in and confess.

The living God, who died, yes, but who is forever God eternal, the God who rose victoriously from the grave that first Easter morning to assure us our salvation is complete and eternal life in heaven for us is secured...that's the God we believe in and confess.

It's that God who has saved us and forgiven us of all our sins through his life, death, and resurrection, it's that God whom we believe in and confess.

Friends, that's what Paul is getting at in our verses this morning. Our salvation is not a matter of doing and earning, but of receiving. It is confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and confidently believing that God raised him from the dead as our Savior and substitute.

Christ has done everything. God's Word proclaims this glorious truth to us, and that same Word also works faith in our hearts to believe and accept Christ's righteousness. The Word creates the confidence to say, "This Jesus is my Lord."

It's no coincidence where the confession of faith falls within our worship, either after the gospel or the sermon. It closes out our section of worship focusing on the Word. The Word, which first penetrates the heart and creates or strengthens faith there. And then that faith, if it is true and living faith, shows itself in the confession of believing lips.

That's our privilege. It's a pleasure to confess our faith in Jesus, then! So now, what simple steps can we take to make this (again) seemingly redundant part of worship more meaningful?

Learn it. Learn what you believe. You know, this place is an easy, non-threatening place to express your beliefs. Out there, it's much more difficult to share your faith in Jesus (not that we shouldn't, but it's not as easy).

So, know what you believe. God's Word is/should be the only basis for your confession. If you're have a hard time making it through one of our creeds, look to God's Word. Are they in agreement? Unsure of what they actually mean? Ask questions. I'm more than happy to point you to God's Word for the answers. You see, it's not cheating to hold up a Bible and say, "Here's what I believe." It's a cop-out if you use that in lieu of actually going in there so you can be articulate about what you believe

Next, memorize it. Be prepared for when someone asks you what you believe, like what do you believe about Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper? What do you believe about infant baptism? What's the simple gospel message you believe? Being ready to answer, not only is it in line with God's Word

(Peter tells us, “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”). It will make you more comfortable in sharing your faith with others out there.

That’s why these confessions of faith...these creeds even exist...to give believers simple statements of faith to share with others. Work at memorizing these creeds here so you’re comfortable sharing them out there.

The third step? Speak it. It sounds so obvious, but I’ll tell you, I’ve been at worship services before where I’ll look up and see people not participating in this part of worship. Why not? I don’t know. Here, our confession of faith is an opportunity to speak with our mouths what we believe in our hearts. If you can’t do it here, will you out there?

Finally, look up and around. If I asked you where you stand on abortion or some other topic you’re passionate about, you wouldn’t stare at the ground. You wouldn’t google it on your phone and read a response back to me. You’d look at me, and you’d be speaking from the heart.

That’s where your faith in Jesus resides. In here. The Apostles’ Creed...it’s not a prayer. God doesn’t need you to tell him what you believe. He’s already seen into your heart. But you know who can’t? I can’t. No one else around you can either. This is an opportunity for you to stand up and tell those around you, “This is the God in whom I believe.” In my Bible Information Classes, I’ve always encouraged people to look up during the Creed, even look around and backwards (which sounds weird and feels uncomfortable, I know). You’re telling every person around you what you believe.

Because, ultimately, the confession of faith also serves to encourage each other. I would have a hard time advocating “All Lives Matter” in the middle of a Black Lives Matters protest. Besides feeling vastly out of place, I would feel extremely threatened, and odds are I would probably be more likely to keep my mouth shut instead of saying anything.

But here, everyone is in the same boat of you...confessing to be sinners, confessing to have a Savior, confessing belief in the same triune God. We find comfort in that. We get to give comfort and strength to others in our confession.

Friends, what do you believe? What you believe in your heart is gifted by God and guided by his Word. That equals the best confession you could give. There’s no reason to stay quiet anymore.

So gladly stand up and confess with your mouth what you believe in your heart. Proudly declare, “I’m with him! I’m with God! I believe in God, who loves me, who saved me, who forgives me.” Amen.