

A Faith, Hope, Love Church...

1. A few weeks ago, the Cassillys and I helped Kami with one of her annual projects, a Scot Hamilton charity event that raises a lot of money to fight children's cancer. When we finally got a chance to sit in the volunteer room and eat our late supper, three ladies joined our table. In sharing bits of our lives, they asked me what kind of church I pastored.
2. This was actually the third time I'd been asked that day. Two other volunteers automatically asked "What kind of church do you pastor?" Two didn't flinch much when I told them and one had never heard of us (!!!).
3. What kind of church are we? What kind of church did Jesus envision? If you talk to people in our religious tribe, you can get a wide variety of answers – some of them very good and some of them very bad. We are NOT unique in this, as other churches have history, too. (Nadia and her Presbyterian story)
4. Broaden this a bit: ask the world or ask media (not the same thing, regardless of what media thinks) what Christianity is and what churches are like; ask them if there is any value to having churches and faith in our culture and the answers will be...interesting.
5. Now, ask educators and work your way up the line (in chronology, not quality) from elementary school to post graduate school what they think the value of faith and church to be.
6. Why is there so much division and why are so many comments and portrayals of people of faith so relentlessly negative? Check out the reviews of faith based movies, the social media comments on Christians' statements of faith, the attacks on "thoughts and prayers" etc.
7. We need to stand before the world and admit: our reputation is not spotless and we deserve some of those stains. Churches were not guiltless when it came to matters of race, of the value of women, social justice issues, caring for the poor, or even the purity of the clergy. That said, please look at who drove the movements to free the

slaves, hallow women and treat them as equals before God, and who built the hospitals and homes for orphans. Who drives charity even now? Who responds fastest to disasters – national, state wide, and all the way down to the tiny disasters that shatter one life at a time? Christians do that – and always have.

8. When Christians lose their way and treat their faith as a mere tradition that comforts them, or as a product that must meet their needs in some sort of spiritual consumerism, or when we just are blind to the needs of those Jesus sought out when he was on earth, we need to reset our faith.
9. The creeds were designed for just that purpose. This is our last lesson on the creeds and I hope you found them valuable. Christians used these for at least 1400 years (200-1600). Were things perfect? No – Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition anyone? – but they held us together as the Spirit continued to work on us. And He is still working on us. We are not now what we will be.
10. Look at the last sections of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. [SLIDE ONE]. Look at these a bit longer and what do you see? What strikes me is the grace, love and optimism I see here. The creeds define us as a people of faith, hope and love. That should remind us of what Paul left for us: [SLIDE TWO]
11. In fact, the last portions of the creeds look a lot like Paul's impassioned statement here: [SLIDE THREE] This is the gospel. This is what we are all about.
12. [SLIDE ONE] We believe in one church, one body of believers that encircles the entire world. We believe that the kingdom of God exists NOW, not later in some pie in the sky dream. We believe that every heart that believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is part of the kingdom of God.
13. We divide when we try to say more than the Lord says about faith and practice. We divide when we have to stick our fingers into the pot and stir it...even when it isn't our pot, isn't our meal, and isn't our kitchen. Will some who claim that they believe that Jesus is Lord be lost? It seems so here: [SLIDE FOUR]

14. But before we start deciding whose faith is acceptable and whose is not, we should remember these words from Jesus: [SLIDE FIVE]. The angels do the dividing, not us. Never us.
15. We believe in the communion of the saints – something that transcends time and place (see Hebrews 12). We believe in the oneness of believers (Alexander Campbell's stance on war).
16. We believe in the resurrection of the dead. That gives us a huge amount of courage and freedom. Satan has always used time and death against us. He keeps us busy, pushes us to be busier, and piles on guilt if we aren't so busy that we have no time for God, family, and Sabbath.
17. He uses death to frighten us into fearing that we have to rush and get our joy now. He causes crushing debt, divorce, sinful behavior...all in the name of getting our joy, our life right now.
18. And he frightens us out of taking appropriate risks (on our deathbed, we regret what we didn't do). Remember the words of Paul: [SLIDE SIX]
19. We are baptized. Our sins are forgiven. We entered the water of baptism and were immersed, a reflection of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. In obedience to the command of Christ, we were baptized, seeing our sins washed away and knowing that we now were a part of the communion of saints. (Luther "but I have been baptized")
20. And those words should comfort us! We are part of something worldwide. We are part of something universal. We are part of something holy. We are part of something that transcends time and space. We are part of the holy, indwelled by the Holy Spirit, by the Father God, and by Jesus, our Lord and Savior. They live in us and in the invisible chorus around us.
21. Encourage one another with these words.

22. Let us close with a recitation of the portions of the creeds that end our journey through the essentials of our faith. [SLIDE ONE]

Now...all that remains is faith, hope and love. Live what we say we believe and we can change the world as we change ourselves.