

**20th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**October 7, 2018**

Text: Hebrews 1:1-4 and 2:5-12

Theme: Statement of Faith

Last Sunday we held our first *New Connections* meeting at Redeemer. It is an initiative started by our synod that encourages all of us to be more intentional about growing the church. Each congregation is to explore new, creative ways to engage people in faith conversations, to make them feel welcome when they come into any of our houses of worship, and to offer them opportunities to be involved in meaningful ministries. It is not about growing our membership but about helping people outside of the church to make connections with those of us inside the church because we believe we have something to offer. We are committed to doing this work because we all need to know the unconditional love of God and experience his unending forgiveness as we place our hope in God through Christ.

It was an awesome meeting. All ideas were received with enthusiasm as we worked around the concepts of *Invite, Welcome, and Involve*. It led us to develop two phrases that will describe our overall purpose: *Love Our Neighbor* and *Planting Seeds of Faith*.

At the end of the day I reviewed the *New Connections* materials once more (the ones we received from the synod office) to glean some more ideas for our next meeting. One thing that caught my attention was the fact that churches are starting to develop 100-word statements that their members could use when an opportunity arose to speak about their faith to others. It is a worthwhile exercise because I hear consistently from people that they do not feel well-equipped to talk about their faith. We do not know what to say or how to say it.

We are handed the perfect place to start when we study our lesson from Hebrews. Imagine my absolute excitement when I saw that the heading for the opening verses of Hebrews is an introduction to the author's statement of faith. I am not suggesting that this is what we use as our statement of faith because when we look at it ... it is beautiful but cumbersome. However, I am confident we can dissect it and rephrase it to meet our purposes.

It starts with a clear declaration and celebration of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It affirms that God speaks. In the past God spoke to his people through the prophets but now God speaks directly to us through his Son. It is truly incredible that God sent his Son in human form so that when he speaks we hear it through the voice of Jesus Christ. God sent his Son to be with us, to teach us, and to have a real relationship with us. If we want to know what God is like then all we have to do is look at Christ. If we want to know if God loves us then all we have to do is look at Christ on the cross.

In his statement of faith the author of Hebrews is answering the question Jesus posed to his disciples in our lessons three weeks ago: *Who do people say that I am?*

Jesus is the Son of God. He sustains all things through his powerful word. He is the redeemer of the world and above all the angels. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. We look at Christ and his life and his mercy and his justice and we can be confident that we are seeing a true image of God. We see him embrace the ones nobody else would embrace and we learn to hold the unlovable and the untouchable. We see Christ forgive sinners and it leads us to forgive as we have been forgiven. We see him heal the sick and it moves us to show compassion to those who need our care. In our gospel lesson for today we see Jesus tackle issues like divorce while in the next scene he holds little children in his arms and we learn how to handle the ebb and flow of life.

And in the verses that were not read this morning, it is because of the identity of Jesus Christ that we must pay greater attention to what we have heard. We are to give our relationship with Christ the highest priority so that we do not drift away from him. In this *Letter to the Hebrews* the early Christians were being persecuted for their faith. They were under great pressure to renounce Christ as their Savior. But the author encouraged the people to cling to Christ and not let go.

In the distance we hear our brothers and sisters in Christ cry out when they are being persecuted for their faith because they do not back down from the truth of the gospel. But the temptation to drift away is real. Almost to the other extreme we might slack off and get lazy about our faith and we could reach a dangerous point of not caring.

Here is a command to listen to the Son of God and to take his words to heart. It is an urgent message that we hear in Hebrews. Consider Christ! Listen to him. Focus on him. Stay close to him and keep him in your thoughts. Learn from him every day. Run with endurance the race that is set before you. Run and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

And as we fix our eyes on Christ the author takes us back to Psalm 8 and offers a brief reflection on where we stand with God:

*What are human beings that you are so mindful of us?*

*Why do you care so deeply for us?*

We see how insignificant we are in the larger scheme of creation. But God has put us in a place of prominence. God formed and molded us in his image and gave us dominion over all of creation. And we may not understand why God cares for us so deeply but we know that God cares because of what we have heard and what we have seen through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The authenticity of human life and the authenticity of divine love are wrapped up in the Son of God. Jesus is real and was made personal and accessible to us when he was born over two thousand years ago. We see him in his glory and through his humiliation, in suffering and in power, with authority and as a servant, but in all ways clearly demonstrating to us his radical grace and his radical obedience. He puts our ordinary human experiences in reach of his radical love.

Remember that Jesus posed two questions to the disciples. The first question was: *Who do people say that I am?* And we just heard how the author of Hebrews answered that for us in a beautiful way this morning in his statement of faith.

But the next question Jesus posed in our lesson three weeks ago was this: *But who do you say that I am?*

It is time to start our work on that 100-word statement of faith that each of us can carry around with us and retrieve it when called upon to answer that question. We need to say it in our own words and in our own way so that we can own it and so those who listen to it can hear it. In the very act of voicing our words of faith (at the center of which God is speaking to us through his Son, Jesus Christ) we start to make connections with our brothers and sisters in the world.

*Who do I say Jesus Christ is in my life?*

I truly believe Jesus is the Son of God and he is revealed to me in Scripture. When I see and listen to him in the gospels then I see God, the one who created this world (and me) in all of its beauty. From Christ I learn how to live my life and I cling to him when things do not go as I had planned. In Christ I see the unconditional love God has for all people. Through him alone I see the fullness of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For today that is my statement of faith.

94 words (and still a work in progress)

What would your statement of faith look like?

Amen