

I believe in one God in three persons, God the Creator, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

I believe that God the Creator is beyond the complete intellectual grasp of any human being. God created the entire universe out of nothing in the big bang, and yet cares enough to number the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30). God lives between the molecules of all things (my theory), knows all things, creates all things, sustains, and powers all life on earth, literally through the sun and mystically by God's sovereign power. I believe the periodic table of the elements is an example of God's creative design. God set the earth at precisely the right tilted orbit at the correct distance from the sun to be neither too hot nor too cold to support life. God created people, gave us dominion over all living things and decided every created thing was excellent, including us. (Genesis 1:31) God loves us with the kind of love parents have for their children, seeking us and drawing us in. "In our baptism we enter the covenant God has established. Within this covenant God gives us new life, guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love." (BoCW p. 406) God doesn't force us to return that love like little programmed robots; otherwise our worship would not really be love at all. (6.023.2) God also allows us to suffer the consequences of and to learn from our mistakes.

Unfortunately, people are curious and selfish creatures. I don't know whether there was a literal first family, but I do know that we get full of ourselves and believe we can be self-sufficient. If we really understood how weak and helpless we are without God, none of us could stand; we would go home to God like the prodigal son in Luke 15.

God loves us all equally and without regard for gender, race, or other superficial differences that people use to see themselves as superior. Yet we often think we know better than God. I believe this is the starting point of all sin, thinking our own ways are best. We even think we can and should dominate others because we think we know better than they do or that we are more important than they are. Pride leads to arrogance and the idolatry of thinking we are mini-gods (9.12) and that our ways are so important that we are justified in using guns, bombs, and nuclear and chemical weapons to destroy each other at the cost of lives, resources, and the earth. I believe we are called as a church to political action to bring about peace and end the proliferation of all weapons in countries where such action would make a difference, even at the risk of personal safety. I believe that our despoiling of this beautiful and fragile planet is sin, and we must repent of it, change our ways, and repair it before it will no longer sustain life.

God knew this self-centered nature was our downfall. God gave us the Ten Commandments to be our moral laws and help us understand how to love and obey God and to see outside ourselves, treating others as we would like to be treated. God spoke to and through the prophets. But I believe that parts of the Bible were written *about* God by people who were trying to write truth as they understood it or as a historical record, rather than as something God spoke to them. I don't believe that every word in the Bible was written by God whispering in someone's soul. As Rev. Peter Enns said, "In the same way that Jesus is—must be—both God and human, the Bible is also a divine and human book." Scripture should be approached with prayer and with the discernment that comes from reading the whole of it, studying the meaning in the context of the passage and the culture of the period as well as what other passages tell us about the nature of God.

Despite the guidance of Scripture, we all sin, no matter how hard we might try, because that is our nature and narrow perspective. Because God's character is forgiving and merciful, slow to anger and full of grace and truth, God sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins and reconcile the world to God (John 1:1-18; 9.08).

Jesus was there at the beginning of the world and participated in creation. (John 1:1) He was begotten of God into human flesh, not made. He led a sinless life and was a perfect role model of how we should live. His example was that of a servant (washing the disciples' feet; John 13:5), eating with sinners and outcasts, healing the sick, humble, yet strong. He told us the way to follow God, clarifying and expanding on the Commandments (Rogers p. 95). He was wise, but not arrogant. His righteousness angered and shamed the people in power. He was tortured and killed, taking the punishment we should have had, becoming the atonement for our sin and protecting us from the wrath of God. Jesus' resurrection was the proof of God's reconciling work through him. (9.53)

When Christ died, the curtain in the temple was torn in two (Luke 23:44), symbolizing the end of the need for a human high priest to intercede for us with God. Jesus is now our high priest, and we can go to God with our needs and our repentance knowing that Christ is pleading for us. Indeed, now nothing on earth can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38,39).

Our gratitude for his sacrifice, the forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of eternal life should impel us all to go out and do God's work in the world, loving one another and our enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27,35), working together for justice, freedom, healing, and peace (10.4.71). Gratitude leads us to joy, which, unlike happiness, is not dependent on what *happens* in our lives. Joy comes from knowing how much God has done for us and how much God loves us. We can't say we love our brothers and sisters and simply wish them well. We need to serve God by sharing what God has blessed us with: our material goods, the work of our hands, our faith and its teachings, our kindness, and our emotional and spiritual support. We also need the mutual help, support and love of being part of a community of faith in the church. We can accomplish more together than alone. We need to share in the Lord's Supper as a means of worshiping and connecting to Christ, to pray and study Scripture together, and to hold each other accountable.

God calls all kinds of people to ministry, women and men, rich and poor, of every sexual orientation and background to preach the Word and help bring about God's kingdom on earth.

We need to be leaders of the movement toward equal pay for equal work, tolerance of sexual differences and acceptance of cultural differences that do not violate God's values while working for lawful and peaceful change of practices that do. Rape, the sex trade, and sexual harassment are dehumanizing and need to be addressed as the sin they are.

I believe we need to mend fences with the rest of Christendom. Christ didn't come to give us things to fight over. He came to save us, all of us that are willing to respond to the faithfulness of Christ and the calling of the Spirit with faith. There is one universal church that can all agree on the truth that **Jesus is Lord**, and with the power of the Spirit, work toward reconciliation.

Jesus did not leave us without help to do these things, but gave us the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, instruct, warn, comfort, and love us more directly and personally than we could have understood or received God's love before. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith (BSF 10.4.54, Gal 3:5). The Spirit is our helper, and guide, and prays for us when we don't know how to pray for ourselves (Romans 8:28).

Our intellectual understanding of God and God's design and purpose for us will never be complete, but thanks to Christ, we can accept and internalize God's love by the work of the Spirit. We can be lit from the inside, spreading love like a candle spreads light in a room. We can love and obey God without knowing all the answers. As we work, we await the return of Christ, praying for the advent of his Kingdom on earth and the end of the reign of evil, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus."