

The gift of faith that I have chosen to claim is the result of the witness of my family, of the Presbyterian congregation in which I grew up, of Presbyterian seminaries, of churches I have served, and of saints who have loved and nurtured me. I happily count myself among the many who have all been claimed by a Living God. I have known and experienced the Word of God in many facets: The Word Living (“made flesh”), The Word Written in Scripture, The Word Proclaimed in Exposition, The Word in Sacrament, The Word Enacted in surprising events that reveal God’s Living Presence to me daily.

I believe that the God of All Creation chooses to be shrouded in mystery, silence, and wonder as well as be revealed in small and world-shattering ways. God chooses to create a vast and varied array of living creatures, culminating in humans formed in God’s image, all of whom God called “good.” And good we are. In God’s image, we are given life, creativity, and freedom. We choose to do good and we choose to do evil. When we do not trust in the Providence and Bounty of God, we act in ways that fulfill our own needs at the expense of others. When we abandon an intimate relationship with God, in our longing and “nakedness,” we seek other things to fill that need deep within. God’s desire for us is Shalom, well-being, blessedness and wholeness. While we choose this lifestyle some of the time, we do not choose it all the time. In our confusion and despair, we reach out for what will fulfill us and save us. God answers that prayer in the Living Word who came to dwell among us.

In Jesus of Nazareth we see how we are to live as people utterly devoted to and trusting in God. The Gospels tell us of the life-changing encounters that people experienced with Jesus. In nearly every engagement, persons were liberated, whether from debilitating illnesses, oppressive religious beliefs and practices, or the limited power of politicians. Despite opposition, Jesus faithfully persisted in proclaiming Good News until he was betrayed, arrested, sentenced to death and was executed by those who wielded power for their own benefit. But God defied those petty schemes and raised Jesus from death to life, thus showing us the ultimate Power of God over any temporary evil act or situation. The Followers of Jesus were transformed by their faith in God, empowered by the Spirit and led forward by the Living Word to proclaim this Good News. Since then, the Church has been calling others to join this movement of life-changing love, justice, peace, unity and joy.

The Work of the Church is essentially Trinitarian Prayer: Hospitality that leads to Serving, Worshiping that leads to Healing, Learning that leads to Growing. God works through us to call others into the Church to do this work. One enters the Community of Faith by the Sacrament of Baptism where we pass through the waters of death and rise up with Christ. Within the Community of Followers one is nurtured by the Word, read and proclaimed and embodied at the Holy Table in the Sacrament of Thanksgiving (Eucharist). In each Sacramental Act of the Church, followers re-member and re-constitute themselves among the faithful, recollect the acts of Jesus and recommit their future to the Living Christ. All engage in this lifecycle of prayer: we step down and we rise up; we go in and we reach out, we fall back and we move forward. In listening, in caring and in mission, we as the Church enfold others into community to empower one another to live in love and overcome injustice. Together we do nothing less than change for good, not only persons, but the world.

An imperfect Church, led by imperfect individuals nevertheless strives to follow the Ways of Christ, the Wisdom of the Spirit and the Love of God to fulfill it’s calling. Every person who has been created by God has been created for a purpose: loving and serving and enjoying God. Every person is given a vocation, being called by God to use one’s life, one’s talents, one’s energy to make this world the world God intended it to be. It is the role of the Church to welcome everyone, nurture everyone, empower everyone and set a place at the Table for everyone who has answered the call to serve and follow the Risen Christ. This Table is a symbol of the heavenly Realm of God where all the faithful will ultimately be gathered eternally. This is God’s promise and our hope. Meanwhile, we live and work, we listen and share, we pray and proclaim with joy the glory of God who is creating, redeeming and empowering life-for-us.