

**“I Believe in God...”**

**Psalm 14 Matthew 28:16-28**

**Scott B. Martin - June 28, 2009**

The UCC Statement of Faith will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary July 5<sup>th</sup>. To honor this I am starting a sermon series based on my interpretation of Statement of Faith. The original SOF was developed shortly after the Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed churches merged to create the United Church of Christ in 1957. Theologians from both sides of the merger met over a period of time to develop the original SOF and it was adopted at the General Synod July 5, 1959. It was one very important way for the newly “united” denominations to celebrate their oneness in Christ.

It is important to note that the SOF is NOT a creed. It is a testimony of faith, NOT a TEST of faith. There is a big difference. Creedal churches tend to say that members must believe what is in the creed to be members. The SOF is never used in this fashion. You will notice if you look in the back of our hymnal that not only is the SOF to be found there, so are several other “creeds”, which can also be used in our churches.

Because of this approach to the SOF it has in its short history undergone several revisions. Dr. Robert Moss, former General President and Minister of the UCC, developed an inclusive language version that was used for many years. In 1981 the SOF was revised once again in the form most of our churches use today. We use the doxology form of the SOF, which was officially adopted in 1981. The

original SOF ended with a doxology, praise of God, which is unusual for a creed. Now the whole SOF praises God

Before I move into the opening segment of the SOF let me hasten to say that the SOF can not be equated with *faith*. As Daniel Day Williams and Roger Shinn pointed out in their book on the original SOF ***“Certainly nobody should assume that the faith of any church can be encompassed in its words. BUT words are important. ... A belief that is unsaid is incomplete, and a belief that is well said becomes a power for life and action.”***

Sooner or later in life questions inescapable questions arise: “In what will you place your trust?” “What is the purpose of life?” “Is there more to life than the material, physical world?” “What, if anything, is important in life, or should we just eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die?” Questions like these demand answers and involve making choices based on those answers.

That’s enough introduction and history. Let’s begin our look at the SOF. The opening statement sets the tone for the whole SOF: ***“We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify.”***

I remember when singer/songwriter Bob Dillon put out a Christian album. I ran out and bought it. One of the songs on there is entitled “You got to serve somebody.” “It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’ve got to serve somebody.” There is a lot of truth in this statement. We have to give our heart, our allegiance to something or somebody. I would add to Dillon’s too options, which by the way are very biblical, one more, we can be totally self-serving.

One of the things I really like about the SOF is that it is primarily about God and how God works in the world. It is not primarily about us and how we act in the world, although this is present. Belief in God can and should make a difference in how we live in the world. If it doesn't then one can not truly be said to believe in God. The word "belief" literally means, "by life." For a true believer their life, as well as their words, is a statement of faith. One's life says what, if any, god one believes in and what one values as a result of that belief.

Let us say right up front that no one can prove logically, beyond a shadow of a doubt the existence of God. Intellect can be used to defend faith, but it can not be used to prove to another the reality of faith. The opposite is also true. No one can prove logically, beyond a shadow of a doubt that God does not exist. The intellect can be used to tear down belief in God but it can not prove beyond question to another human being that God does not exist.

Frederick Buechner, in his book, *Wishful Thinking* (p.31), speaking of the so called "proofs of God" that **"...a twelve year old child can see that no one of them is watertight. And even all of them taken together won't convince anybody unless his predisposition to be convinced outweighs his predisposition not to be."**

Where does this leave us? Faith or unfaith is a choice. One can try and sit on the fence but sooner or later a choice must be made. One Christian spoke of making a "leap of faith." Sooner or later one must move beyond what our minds are capable of settling. Deciding whether or not God exists is not like solving a mathematical equation

or deciphering a physics problem. Faith involves a leap into the improvable, into the mysterious, into the unknowable.

Many of the important things in life are this way: love, friendship, duty, justice. You can not ultimately prove that you love someone logically, beyond all doubt. All you can do is act on your love and hope the person feels loved and visa versa. Many of the most important things in life can not be proved with a scientific formula.

If you were in church last week we explored of pain and tragedy can lead us to not believe in God. The French philosopher Simone Weil said that there are two things which “pierce” the human heart. One is “affliction.” The second is “beauty.” We can all understand affliction, but we may find “beauty” to be a harder concept. Certainly, she meant more than just physical beauty, although this is partially what she meant.

Jesus saw a very poor woman in the temple. She only had two small coins. It was all she had, yet she lovingly put both in the offering. Seeing this Jesus called the disciples over to observe this woman. She had done a rare and “beautiful thing” which was worthy of note. Her love and devotion were worthy of emulating.

Some twenty, twenty five years ago I spent a night in a downtown Tijuana hotel. The window of my room looked out on several nightclubs that blared music into the wee hours of the morning. Unable to sleep, I looked out the window on the night life below. A man came stumbling down the street and literally fell down in the gutter unconscious, most likely from drinking too much. Another man came along a few moments later. My first thought was he was going to rob the man. The next thing I knew he produced a blanket and

gently laid it over the man in the gutter. It was a strange site, but there was a strange beauty in it.

There is a marvelous poem by Emily Dickinson

This World is not Conclusion,  
A Species stands beyond –  
Invisible, as Music –  
But positive as Sound –  
It beckons, and it baffles –  
Philosophy – don't know –  
And through a Riddle, at the last –  
Sagacity, must go –  
To guess it, puzzles scholars –  
To gain it, Men have borne  
Contempt of Generations  
And Crucifixion, shown –  
Faith slips – and laughs, and rallies –  
Blushes, if any see –  
Plucks at a twig of Evidence –  
And asks a Vane, the way –  
Much Gesture from the Pulpit –  
Strong Hallelujahs roll –  
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth  
That nibbles at the soul –

The tooth that nibbles at the soul, what an amazing description!

The Psalmist, by modern standards, is exaggerating when he says, **“Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does**

**good.”** There can be a certain “foolishness” in atheism, just as there can be a foolishness in having faith. I certainly do not believe that only atheists do abominable deeds. People who claim to have faith have done their share of abominable deeds and some atheists are really good people. Perhaps this is why the psalmist goes on to say, **“The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. They have all gone astray,....”**

No doubt this is an exaggeration, but there is a kind of wisdom that comes from “seeking after God.” It is not that God plays hide and seek with us but that in our limited human way we have trouble seeing God at work in the world on regular basis. We need the movement of God’s Spirit to provide the “tooth that nibbles at our soul”, to help us catch a glimpse of the “beauty” of God that constantly surrounds us. If we pay attention to our lives and the world around we will be struck by the profundity of it.

When I read the scriptures about the life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus, who we know as the Christ, I believe I catch a glimpse of the “beauty” of God at work in the world. When I look around at the lives of others who likewise believe this I catch a glimpse of the “beauty” of God at work in them. Perhaps I even catch a glimpse, from time to time, the “beauty” of God at work in my own life when I act on this belief.

***“We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify.” Amen.***

