

I suggest to you today that there are three delightful states of Faith.

- I Know

The first is the state where you know what you know. This is a state of conviction. You might be saying with Martin Luther in the face of opposition and scrutiny, “Here I stand; I can do no other.”

I don’t just believe this to be true, I know it!

I am committed to this. This is what I do. My identity is in this. This is who I am. Together, this is who we are.

There is strength in this state of faith.

But like many things that are true, there can be two sides to the coin. This strong faith that knows what is true, that knows what is right, that knows what is real... may become coercive. This faith may demand conformity. “If you want to be one of us, you must believe like we do and act like we do.”

“To be one of us, you must convert; you must change your way of thinking and behaving.”

I used to joke about teaching confirmation as more like teaching con-formation. There was little room for diversity or questioning. Simply memorize these passages, these teachings. These are the basics, the fundamentals. One does not change the fundamentals.

But if one disagrees or doubts, then classrooms, life itself, can become chaotic, disruptive, controversial.
Or free and exciting.

At its best, “I know” offers some comfort and security. Confidence.

“I know the sun will rise... I know my partner loves me... I know I can do this!”

At its worst, “I know” breeds rebellion. You hear the resistance in the tone: “I know, I know, I know.”

- I don’t know

But what if I do not know?

Certainty may give way to uncertainty.

Now, some uncertainty may be rather inconsequential. I do not know what makes a sailboat go forward against the wind. I do not know what lifts a jet plane weighing hundreds of tons. I do not know why some people prefer tea over coffee. I do not know what the appeal is in country music.

I don't know. It just doesn't matter.

To not know has little bearing on who I am or how I live.

Maybe I just need a little more information. Maybe I need a little more experience. Maybe I need to spend time putting things together differently. Maybe I need someone to show me more.

Let me ask you a question. Do all dogs go to heaven?

Some of you might take a stand and say emphatically, "Absolutely!"

Some of you might respond, "I guess we'll find out!"

And others of you might say, "I don't know... does it really matter?"

Do all dogs go to heaven? Some of you, beginning to put things together a little differently, might say, "I don't know. But I am discovering that all life matters. God is delighted in all God's creatures. God gives life and nurtures life and is always creating life. So, maybe it's true... maybe it's likely that there might be dogs in heaven.... I'm just not sure about dinosaurs."

On the other hand, Not knowing can be painful. Not knowing can raise uncertainty.

If I don't know... and that makes me uneasy... I may make something up. And if you disagree with that pretense at knowing, I may get defensive. As we continue to disagree, we both dig in. And defensive becomes divisive.

And I may just withdraw and stop coming.

But I'm saying that this second state of faith may be the beginning of something. To say "I don't know" can mean I am open to learning... open to experiencing... open to listening. To say, "I don't know" might even mean I am open to God.

- I wonder

And then we slide into the third delightful state of faith.

- *I know*

I don't know

I wonder...

Remember, I said last week that there is a difference between one's belief and one's faith. There's a difference in content and there's a difference in knowing.

If “I know” can be open to curiosity, what I know – what I thought I knew might grow more deeply.

Think about what you thought love was at 15. Then think about what you thought love was on your wedding day... Then think about what you thought love was when your child was born... when your child left home... when your child got into trouble....

What we think we know – what we are certain of – needs to be elastic, needs to be adaptive.

Perhaps you had a strict religious upbringing and you were taught God was rigid and judgemental and frightening. But then you learned forgiveness, really experienced forgiveness...

Or maybe you thought a life of faith was boring... a life of faith was serious and somber.. and it cost you too much in time and energy and even financial resources. But then you experienced delight and a deep profound joy and peace... even through tough times.

There’s something in the faithful journey called “the dark night of the soul.” It’s that time of struggle and doubt and questioning. It feels like you are lost and overwhelmed. It feels like a tomb. But you discover it really is a womb! Something is lost. But something else is raised.

It’s in the story of Jesus, isn’t it. Death... and resurrection... an ending... and a new beginning.

I really enjoy talking with people who might say, “I don’t know what I believe any more.” I say in response, “Tell me what you no longer believe in.”

And you know, as likely as not I will say, “I don’t believe that either.”

When belief grows faint, faith just might grow more brightly.

The state of faith that says, “I wonder...” can be the beginning of the most exciting faith of all.

I wonder is open to curiosity... open to playfulness... open to delight (one of my most favorite faith words – delight). I wonder is open to adventure and experimentation. I wonder is open to the surprise of grace.

What does this all mean for creeds?

Creeds may be instructive... but they should not be restrictive.

Creeds can express what is familiar about the divine... they may point to the divine... but they cannot define the divine or contain the divine.

Hold your creed – it is the anchor and the sail and the compass we considered last week. But hold your creed lightly.

Learn from others. Learn from authorities you trust. But claim what you find to be authentic – real. Authorities can instruct you from outside. But what you know to be authentic comes from inside.

So... let's return for just a moment and consider the statement of faith we proclaimed this morning.

What in these words do you know to be true? What would you say you do not know to be true? And what in these words invites you to wonder?

We won't all answer the same way.

We won't study every word, every thought. But we will look at some.

- An Affirmation - We are a Pilgrim People

What does it mean to affirm something?

You posit – you consider – you agree?

And what is a Pilgrim People? I don't know... I wonder....

-

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
We proclaim Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One,

That sounds familiar. I know this...

-

confessing him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But I do not know if Jesus is the Lord of my life – I do not know
if I live up to that.

-

In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
we acclaim Jesus as the Lord of the Church,

The church – your church or my church?

There is so much diversity in church... and temple... and synagogue
In language and ritual, art and music....

Is it more important to focus on the Jesus at the center than at all that surrounds him? I wonder...

•

the Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation.

Head – Heart – Hands?

We certainly need a new creation!

Is creation at the center of my faith?

Or extinction?

•

We acknowledge that we live and work between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which he will bring.

The final consummation – Is that in heaven

Or on earth?

•

We are a pilgrim people,
always on the way towards a promised goal;

Whose promises can I trust? What is my – our – God's goal?

•

on the way Christ feeds us with word and sacraments,
and we have the gift of the Spirit
in order that we may not lose the way.

Again, familiar...

•

We will live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, bearing witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will.

I don't know...

•

We affirm that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

What is my role – my task – my purpose in the church?

How is that the same or different from yours?

•
Together with all the people of God,
we will serve the world for which Christ died.
And we await with hope the day of the Lord Jesus.

To serve is so different from own – manage – control – conquer – possess. Have we figured out what it means to serve?

and how much time do we have until Christ's day comes?
I know... I Don't Know... I wonder

Three delightful states of faith.

I think we have more to talk about – pray about – wonder about than the weather and sports and the economy and the election.

But then, maybe faith has something to do with weather and sports and the economy and the election.

I wonder...

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confessing him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
we acclaim Jesus as the Lord of the Church,
the Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation.

We acknowledge that we live and work
between the time of Christ's death and resurrection
and the final consummation of all things which he will bring.

We are a pilgrim people,
always on the way towards a promised goal;
on the way Christ feeds us with word and sacraments,
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We will live and work within the faith and unity
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We affirm that every member of the Church
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Adapted from the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia
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