

Statement of Faith, Rev. Walt Tennyson, October 2021

My faith is a response to Jesus' invitation, "come, follow me." I walk this journey with a great cloud of witnesses, some of whom have nurtured me in church through prayer, bible stories, preaching, teaching and ministries of compassion and grace. Through this witness I came to know Jesus as fully human and fully God. My church family tells the good news with a particular Christian accent. In **awe**, we believe God to be sovereign over all earthly power, even when our limited human experience might suggest otherwise, "for God's weakness is stronger than human strength." In **gratitude**, we trust in God's saving work, for "once we were no people, but now we belong to each other, and to God." By **grace**, our broken and imperfect humanity bears "the firstfruits of the Spirit."

The stories, images and characters in scripture reveal hope in a world where suffering and evil are pervasive. People bear the image and likeness of God but our lived experience is one of brokenness. Our brokenness leads us to frequently "miss the mark" or "sin" in ways that separate us from God's purpose and love. In our relations with others, sin is the source of violence, greed and hate. In societies, sin leads to misuse of power and the corruption of leaders who exploit fellow human beings. Through personal and social sin, humans choose idols, or false substitutes, for the God who breathed life into us and proclaimed all creation good.

Jesus, as fully human, lived in this world and knew its tendency to choose false substitutes for God. As a teacher, he discerned the life-giving power of scripture and resisted the temptation to fix its truth. As a healer he reached beyond prejudices, assumptions and taboos. Though food and money were scarce, he practiced generosity and hospitality and grew a new community inspired to share. As leader he resisted the earthly way of "lording it over" others. In his words, actions and living, he demonstrated God's will for humanity.

The powers and principalities of the world, then as now, resist threats to self-interest. Jesus rode humbly but resolutely to face corrupted power. Scripture reveals how religious, government and military leaders--with the support of willing crowds--cling in their brokenness to false piety and imperial power. With clarity of identity, purpose and message, Jesus suffered and died on a Roman cross. In great vulnerability and weakness, he, as fully God, defeated the power of sin and death hanging over humanity and the Creation.

The testimony of Jesus' closest friends is that he appeared to them soon after his death. This witness reveals that, like us, they knew his appearance was not usual or customary. In their descriptions of wounds, fear, eating together and mistaking Jesus for a traveler, they draw us into their experience of wonder, mystery and delight that he lives again. In his promises to the faithful that he would be with them always through an advocate, the Holy Spirit, he began a movement to continue his ministry.

The church is a fellowship of saints past and present who seek to be the body of Christ in the world. We are joined to Jesus Christ and his ministry through sacraments that enact and signify critical connections. In the waters of baptism we celebrate our cleansing through the self-giving death of God in Jesus and our engrafting into the family of faith. In the eating of bread and drinking of the cup in the Lord's Supper, we are in communion with the presence of Christ. He feeds us at table as he fed his disciples. In the breaking of bread we remember that in his brokenness he was given to us, and we receive him. In the drinking of the cup we remember that his life was poured out and the power of sin defeated. We drink and receive grace. In eating the bread and drinking the cup we anticipate his promises.

In life and in death we belong to God. Now we see in part, but we trust that when the work of Christ's love on this earth is complete, we will see the fullness of creation. Until that time, the church is called to be a sign, an instrument and foretaste of the new creation in which God's promises are fulfilled.