**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***Ekklesia Series***

***In Your Own Words***

 **February 10th, In the Year of Our Lord 2019**

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**(Unless otherwise noted, CSB17 text is quoted)**

Last Sunday, we looked at the seismic shift, the disturbance of the force, the slow creep of fallen-man’s meddling in God’s structure for His Church. Throughout history, fallen-man has a track record of making a mess of things. God places His Church of “surrendering-faith” on earth beginning with Adam.

Adam walked and talked with the Lord and received instruction form Him (Genesis 1 & 2). We see Abel exercise his faith (Genesis 4) by bringing a firstling-sacrifice to the Lord. Noah brings a sacrifice (Genesis 8:20) to the Lord. Abraham builds an altar to God (Genesis 12:8) to worship Him. These accounts are a witness to us that God established His church in the hearts of people from the beginning. Church is in the heart. The gathering of God’s people to Himself for offering, sacrifice, song, proclamation of His will for our lives has been testified from Adam to us.

Then, in time, due to God’s great love for us, He incarnated himself as Jesus to walk among us and live our lives to a victory over sin and death at the Cross. God, as Jesus, re-teaches the fundamentals of what it is to be human under His plan. There were pre-announcements through the Old Testament. See Jews for Jesus web site. Here are a few listings. https://jewsforjesus.org/answers/top-40-most-helpful-messianic-prophecies/

Jeremiah 31:31; Psalm 22, 118:222-24, 2:1-12; Isaiah, 7:14, 52:13-52:12; Daniel 7:13-14, 9:24-27; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Zechariah 12:10, 11:12-13, 9:9; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 4:5-6

 Then, about two thousand years ago, the angel of the Lord comes to Zacharias, who was performing his priestly duties, and told him his wife Elizabeth (Luke 1) would soon give birth to John who will be the forerunner of the Messiah. Next, the angel of the Lord comes to Mary and Joseph concerning baby Jesus, the Messiah (Matthew 1), and pronounces to them that they will be the parents of Jesus. The story is well-known. The point being, that God works through everyday people and announces before He acts.

 So, God comes to us as Jesus and teaches us, performs miracles, goes to the Cross and dies a physical death to pay for the sins of the world. He then resurrects Himself and walks among the people for 40 days continuing to teach and prepare them for an eternal ministry. Jesus commissions His followers to carry-on with His Holy Spirit operating inside of them. God plans to operate from the hearts of Believers around the world. This is His Church. This is who we are.

 As time marched forward, from the end of the first century and the death of John who was the last eyewitness to the life and teachings of Jesus, man struggles to project the Good News. The challenge that after man thinks for a while, he struggles in finding the form of the message to convey. Man forgets at times that God asked us to come to Him by faith.

From the Incarnation to Nicaea, a lot happened, and, in the minds of well-intended man, there was a need to sum-up things. These Believers had the same challenge we have. There is a lot to say. I mean, what happened? This is why verses like John 3:16 are so valuable. Scripture declares what man hasn’t any words. I have come to the thought in life that simpler is better.

I was hunting in Colorado one year in the 1980’s, and we leased a rancher’s land high in the mountains. We were above Montrose, Colorado. From the elevation where we were camped ~~at~~, we could see the whole town region below us. I asked the rancher how many feet above sea level we were camped. He replied, “I do not know.” I said, “You do not know? You have lived here your entire life; I figured you would know how many feet we were ~~camped at~~.” The rancher paused and said, “You know, that has always been down there, and this is up here.” I thought about the rancher’s answer for some time. I came to the conclusion that I wish my life was simpler.

What is so simple about God? God made a choice to move forward in people, from Adam onward. We Believers are all involved. We shall not forget or downplay the role of God’s Holy Spirit in pushing the Church forward through people. It is clear, beyond a doubt, that men like Peter, John, James and Paul were sufficiently endowed with Holy Spirit authority and gifts to be successful. In fact, they were very successful. So successful that those to whom they witnessed became the next generation of saints to further the Good News. The Gospel could not be contained in one group, one race of people, one nationality or one culture. The Gospel message appealed to all people everywhere. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the most appealing call to all men all over the earth. The well-noted English Pastor **Charles Hadden Spurgeon** (1834-1892) witnessed that it was this passage from Isaiah 45 that was used by God to get his attention. He found, in the days of his youth, the Gospel appealing.

Isaiah 45:20-22 20 "Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save.

 21 "Declare and set forth *your case*; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.

 22 "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

The surrendering plan God proclaims is so simple that even a common woman at the well can receive.

When Jesus approached the **Samaritan woman,** at the well of Jacob, the appeal to Jesus’ grace and mercy captured her attention. She was a sinner that became instantly captivated by the peace Jesus brought her. There is a universal applause to the One who can bring peace. Jesus announced to her, a great sinner, that she could possess eternal life. At the end of the encounter, the women asked Jesus for the water. He gave water leading to eternal life. She then went to tell of her encounter. Grace and mercy are contagious and people want to tell others about their experience.

John 4:9-15 9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

 10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

 11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?

 12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"

 13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband';

 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

 20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

 22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

 27 At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?"

 28 So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men,

 29 "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?"

 30 They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.

 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

 32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

 33 So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him *anything* to eat, did he?"

 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

 35 "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest '? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

 36 "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

 37 "For in this *case* the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.'

 38 "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

 39 From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have* done."

 40 So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

 41 Many more believed because of His word;

 42 and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (Jn. 4:16-42 NAU)

Then there is the encounter with **the woman caught in adultery.** In the face of murderous unforgiveness, Jesus stopped the mob and set the woman free with the words. . . 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

**John 8:1-11 1** But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. 3 **The scribes and the Pharisees** brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*,

 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

(Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22 - These passages deal with a man who takes another man’s wife.) (Where is the man in this scene with the scribe and Pharisees; they forgot to bring him to be stoned?) 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*.

 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

 These accounts written into the Gospel record are witness to God’s uncompromising love, grace and mercy that can be applied to a willing person, a person who surrenders their heart to God. The Gospel message was very appealing to the average person. Life was hard and challenging for most people. The ruling class held sway over society. The message of the Cross applied to anyone regardless of social, economic or political status. The Gospel Message was just not for Jews or a particular race of people. All people are equal under God’s offer of salvation. All people, once they heard the Good News, had to opportunity to see and receive salvation. Their lives were changed, and they had an eternity of which to look forward ~~to~~. God reaches down to us and projects us to live an eternal life starting now.

 So, with the addition of these Creeds of Christendom, we see a well-intended effort to further the Message and grow the Church. We have already acknowledged that the merger of State and Church brought additional burdens upon people. We have noted that God had a working-plan since Adam to reach people with His redemptive plan. To be clear, it is not what these creeds say, it is who delivers them. And are they to be freely offered under no compulsion?

 In time, over a few centuries, the Church developed a litmus test for salvation, thus, to be a Christian. We have noted that it was the leaders in North Africa, like Bishop Cyprian (Carthage) who led the way for infant baptism. They acted on their own and did not recognize the Roman Bishop as Bishop of Bishops. There were several councils held that were not connected to Rome or the Bishops in the east. This took place in the 200’s or 3rd century.

 We talked about the seismic shift from a personal relationship with God to a relationship that was certified by Church leaders and eventually State mandates. To be a good citizen is to be a good Christian and to be a good Christian is to be a good citizen.

**THE APOSTLES CREED [Before year 200 A.D.]**

I believe in God the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; Born of the Virgin Mary;

Suffered under Pontius Pilate;

Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hell;

The third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven;

And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;

The Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints;

The Forgiveness of sins;

The Resurrection of the body;

And the life everlasting. Amen.

**THE NICENE CREED** **325 A.D.**

**I believe** in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,

begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light,

very God of very God,

begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father,

through Whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven,

was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man:

Who for us, too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate,

suffered, and was buried:

the third day He rose according to the Scriptures,

ascended into heaven,

and is seated on the right hand of the Father:

He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,

Who proceeds from the Father and the Son:

Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified:

Who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy, Christian, and apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins,

and I look for the resurrection of the dead and life of the age to come. Amen.

**Constantinople 381**

***I believe*** *in one God, the Father almighty,*

*maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.*

***I believe*** *in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,*

*born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light,*

*true God from true God,*

*begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;*

*through him all things were made.*

*For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,*

*and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,*

*he suffered death and was buried,*

*and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

*He ascended into heaven*

*and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead*

*and his kingdom will have no end.*

***I believe*** *in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,*

*who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*

*who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,*

*who has spoken through the prophets.*

***I believe*** *in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

*I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*

*and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

***51 Chalcedon:*** *We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent,*

*teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood;*

*truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body;*

*consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father*

*according to the Godhead,*

*and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood;*

*in all things like unto us, without sin;*

*begotten before all ages of the Father*

*according to the Godhead,*

*and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation,*

*born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God,*

*according to the Manhood;*

*one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten,*

*to be acknowledged in two natures,*

*inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;*

*the distinction of natures*

*being by no means taken away by the union,*

*but rather the property of each nature being preserved,*

*and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence,*

*not parted or divided into two persons,*

*but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ;*

*as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him,*

*and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us,*

*and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.*

 **The Council of Ephesus 431** was a council of Christian bishops convened in Ephesus (near present-day Selçuk in Turkey) the Roman Emperor Theodosius II.

This third ecumenical council, an effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom,

confirmed the original Nicene Creed,

and condemned the teachings of Nestorius,

Patriarch of Constantinople,

who held that the Virgin Mary may be called the Christotokos, "Birth Giver of Christ" but not the Theotokos, "Birth Giver of God".

It met in June and July 431 at the Church of Mary in Ephesus in Anatolia.

By the time of the fourth council in 451 at Chalcedon, the idea of State and Church working together had become cemented. One of the products of the councils was that certain Bishops or teachers who did not agree with the creeds were excommunicated or exiled. The State-Church wanted unity. To be clear, at this point in time, the State got what it wanted. We shall not forget that it was the State, under Emperor Constantine that called the 1st Church Council at Nicaea. Therefore, when we read these creeds, keep in mind that their statements are not only Church statements but also State approved creeds of faith.

 Looking at the 451 creed, we see additional text as compared to the Nicaea Creed of 325. We note that there is a reference harkening to the previous creed in the last line, “and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.” Both the Apostles and Nicaea Creeds proclaim the Holy Spirit and the Church which the 451 does not. However, the 451 starts with “following the holy Fathers, all with one consent.” This lends to the positioning of the 451 to be a continuation of the is a change from the “one substance” to “consubstantial” in previous creeds. Thus, 451 does not invalidate them. The creed starts with seeking to legitimize their statement by calling upon the “holy fathers” being in one consent. This is important in that it reaches back to the Apostles who wrote the New Testament and also those to whom they witnessed ~~to~~, being the next generation, men like Polycarp and Ignatius.

We see that they have used differed words to seemingly address the same challenges to the identity of Jesus Christ that continued. This is the main theme of 451, to define Jesus. There forwarding the Triune God statement of faith. There is a heavy emphasis on clearly identifying Jesus to be God. Here we see the most broadening effort to say what Jesus simply said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Again, man tends to make a mess of things. Man has to extrapolate his reasoning into Jesus’ simple statement. There are not enough words that man can use to describe Faith in Jesus. The biblical is all we need. After all, it is faith that cannot be physically seen.

**Hebrews 11:1-3 1** Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Excerpt from 451

*one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten,*

*to be acknowledged in two natures,*

*inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;*

*the distinction of natures*

*being by no means taken away by the union,*

*but rather the property of each nature being preserved,*

*and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence,*

*not parted or divided into two persons,*

*but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ;*

 I am personally glad, and to some degree ecstatic, that I never had to memorize any creed, especially the 451. Can you imagine the metaphysical, hermeneutical and exegetical applications a person must have to understand what these creeds actually say? I vote to adopt Jesus’ statement, “I and the father are one.”

 I know there are many in the church world who see that we need to have these statements, these creeds of faith. People want a fuller explanation. But then what is faith? Can it be described in human terms? That is, to a scientific certainty? NO! When the Biblical definition of faith “is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” then there cannot be a scientific definition of a spiritual force that cannot be seen. We have the Biblical definition. We experience faith. The Creeds are a great reflection to see how our predecessors of faith processed the historical event of God’s incarnation. They gave it their best effort, but these statements will always be lacking.

 What is your personal statement of faith? When someone asks what you believe and why, what do you say? A challenge for this week can be to find a quite place to write down in your own words what you believe. You could consult the Bible and quote Scripture. However, in your own words would be more personal.

**First 7 Ecumenical Councils**

1. **325**– 1st Ecumenical Council of Nicaea condemns Arius and clarifies the dogma of Christ’s divin­ity by expanding Creed’s 2nd stanza
2. **381**– 1st Ecum. Council of Constantinople expands 3rd stanza of creed defining the divinity of the Holy Spirit and also condemns Apollinaris’s heresy that Jesus lacked a complete human soul
3. **431**– Council of Ephesus defines Christ as the incarnate Word of God and proclaims Mary *Theotokos* (“God-bearer” or “Mother of God”) after deposing Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople
4. **451**– Ecum. Council of Chalcedon defines Christ as having both a divine and a human nature in one person
5. **553**– 2nd Ecum. Council of Constantinople confirms Christological & Trinitarian doctrine against the Nestorians
6. **680**– 3rd Ecum. Council of Constantinople affirms that Jesus had a truly human will as well as a truly divine will against the Monothelites
7. **787**– 2nd Ecum. Council of Nicaea vindicates the veneration of images based on the humanity of Christ as the image or icon of the unseen God