

Foundations of Presbyterian Discipleship

January 24-February 14, 2020

To be Presbyterian is to join a way of life informed by a particular rhythm: *God calls us in grace and love; we respond in gratitude*. During the next four Sundays in this season of Epiphany, or sometimes called Ordinary Time, we will explore some basic themes that undergird this rhythm from our Presbyterian and Reformed perspective. Each theme will be introduced during worship and there will be additional resources provided for those who wish to go deeper along with some opportunities to reflect on them with others.

There are only two requirements for membership in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation: *baptism* and *profession of faith in Jesus Christ*. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we enter the covenant God established in Jesus Christ. Baptism may occur at any time of life. When an infant is presented for baptism, the parents or guardians, along with the whole congregation, confess their faith in Jesus Christ and promise to “live the Christian faith and to teach that faith” to the child until that child is able to claim and confirm that faith.

Those presenting themselves for baptism or parents presenting a child for baptism are asked three questions that will form the outline for our worship and study:

1. *Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?*
2. *Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior?*
3. *Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and mission through your prayer and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?*

February 7, 2021 Part III: Who Do You Say That I Am? (Q.3)

For Presbyterians the first thing we need to know is that God is a God of *grace*. God loves us in spite of everything we have done or left undone. This truth affects every aspect of our life. Beginning with God’s grace gives us the confidence to address the second part of the question about the reality of *sin* and *evil* whose power also affects every aspect of our lives. It is God’s grace that enables us to *turn away from* sin and to *renounce the evil* that pervades the world around us. God’s grace allows us to recognize we do not live in the way God intended and that the good, life-giving relationships humans enjoyed in the goodness of God’s creation are broken.

We need someone to see us and save us. It is one thing to say that we are willing to turn from sin and renounce evil in the world, but that’s not something we can do on our own. Presbyterians have always acknowledged that we have a particular propensity to mess things up. If left to our own devices, we will continue to make the small kinds of choice that lead to great big terrible realities. We need someone to give us a way out of that horrible cycle. In the Old Testament, the people longed for someone to lead them out of tyranny, oppression, and hatred they both endured and inflicted on one another. They called this person that would come and change everything “*The Messiah*.” Old Testament prophets spoke of this Messiah frequently, describing what God’s appointed deliverer would look, sound, and act like. The prophet, Isaiah, speaks of many characteristics of this Messiah: Isaiah 2:4, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 11:2-5, Isaiah 40:10-11, Isaiah 61:1-13. What characteristics do you see in these prophecies about the Messiah?

The expectations of this coming Savior were pretty high among the people of first century Isaiah. (Remember, these people had gone through half a century of slavery, two forced exiles from the homeland, countless year of persecution.) So when Jesus came on the scene, people started getting excited and asking questions. Might this man finally be the Promised One? Could he be the Redeemer who would rescue Israel? In Matthew 16, after traveling with his followers for quite some time, Jesus finally acknowledges that he is, indeed, the Messiah. In doing so, Jesus also exposes that what his fellow Jews had envisioned as the Messiah wasn’t the complete picture. Jesus, the awaited Messiah had come to restore Israel—but in a manner much different than expected.

Today we will consider the 2nd membership question—what it means to *turn toward Jesus Christ*—what it means to accept him as Messiah—and as our *Lord* and *Savior*.

Some questions for reflection:

1. *What is the significance of naming someone or something?*
2. *What are some of the assumptions about the Messiah during Jesus’ time?*
3. *What does it mean to say that Jesus is your Lord and Savior?*

What Do Some of Our Presbyterian Statements & Confessions Say About Jesus as Messiah, Savior & Lord?

The following are examples of how Presbyterians have spoken about Jesus Christ as Messiah, Savior and Lord as they have read Scripture and encountered him in their particular time and place in history through the power of the Holy Spirit. Each example reflects something of the language in history of the time in which it was written.

The Book of Order

F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ. Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given. To him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

F-1.0204 Christ is the Church's Hope. In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope, and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.

Heidelberg Catechism

Q. 14. Can any mere creature make the payment for us? A. No one. First of all, God does not want to punish any other creature for man's debt. Moreover, no mere creature can bear the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and redeem others from it.

Q. 15. Then what kind of mediator and redeemer must we seek? A. One who is a true and righteous man and yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is at the same time true God.

Q. 18. Who is this mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous man? A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for complete redemption and righteousness.

Q. 34. Why do you call him OUR LORD? A. Because, not with gold or silver but at the cost of his blood, he has redeemed us body and soul from sin and all the dominion of the devil, and has bought us for his very own.

Second Helvetic Confession

Chapter XI. Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World. For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the world, in whom by faith are saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world.... Wherefore, we quite openly profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah, that holy and blessed one whom all the types of the law and predictions of the prophets prefigured and promised; and that God appointed him beforehand and sent him to us, so that we are not now to look for any other. Now there only remains for all of us to give all glory to Christ, believe in him, rest in him alone, despising and rejecting all others aids in life. For however many seek salvation in any other than in Christ alone, have fallen from the grace of God and have rendered Christ null and void for themselves (Gal. 5:4).

Confession of 1967

Part I. Section A. The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them, he took upon himself the judgement under which all mean stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all men. God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement buy a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of a debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for man. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work.

Which statements and images do you find most helpful? Are there other words, images or phrases that you find helpful in describing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?