

My Journey

By Jesse Bozeman

My grandmother was an associate minister for another denomination when I was a child. There was always somewhat of a controversy between my parent's families over religion. I was confused and wanted to learn everything there was to know. I was a child, and the story of Jesus Christ is one of the most compelling stories I have heard. You couldn't make up a better story. I remember being taught the lessons of the Old Testament at Bible study at Murray Hill Presbyterian Church when I was very young. I had always been interested in Jesus, but I didn't understand how important it was to apply the lessons of Christ to my life.

I had a time in my life after my grandfather, who was a great influence on me, passed away. He was a spiritual man, but not a devout attender of church, although both of my grandmothers were. During the time after his death, my church going was hit or miss. I still believed in God but was not close to God. I had gone through many cycles of life, looking for more out of life while never achieving satisfaction or true comfort.

During this time, I learned many trades. One of the first being carpentry. Subsequently, I learned how to do several other construction related skills especially around home construction. I spent most of my early years working in construction and other similar trades.

I struggled for many years to find the source to navigate this world. I am convinced after coming to Christ and learning of His teachings that the Bible and the red letters are our compass. How to bring understanding from the passing of Christ's peace. Finding the understanding of something that is beyond understanding. Although, without knowing the entirety of His teaching, as we will learn these things in His time.

After my Dad passed away, my Mom was involved in the church and I became drawn to Christ's peace that I knew nothing about but longed to understand. I just wanted a little bit of that understanding. I struggled in my early life with the pursuit of worldly things and when I became an adult, I found the grace of God and returned to worship. I am still in the process of refining myself as we will never become perfect. As they say, the more I seek Jesus, the more I find Him, the more I find Him, the more I want to seek Him.

I feel that I have a truer understanding of Christ's teachings since I was an adult when I began to seek the power of His Holy name. I believe that it was a positive thing that I was baptized in my Savior time. I

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was forty-six at the time and it gave me the opportunity to experience the turning over of my soul to Christ of my own free will.

In the process of returning to my faith, I was introduced by God to my lovely wife, Shelley. I first met her in the fellowship hall at Murray Hill Presbyterian Church. She was struggling with two beautiful children that she had recently adopted. I took the opportunity to entertain the children at the table so she could serve their plates. That initiated a lasting friendship. After we were married, I also adopted Samantha and Hannah and we became a full family with my daughter Elissa. My wife and I also have two adult children, Celesta and James and two grandchildren by Celesta, Ayden and Roman.

Since that time, I have been drawn to work for the church as a Sexton and work on the church I attend voluntarily both in ministry and maintenance. I feel the more I apply myself to the responsibilities of taking care of the church as a sexton, the more respect I have for religion. The more I work for God in the churches I serve, the more God works in my life. I know I am imperfect, but since I have turned my life over to this perfect Triune God, the Lord is going to pick me up and dust off my imperfections. But I must be seeking that perfection, otherwise I am cast out with the dregs. I will not be allowed to carry my sins along as baggage.

I believe wholeheartedly that Christ died on the cross for my sins. I still do not think that I am worthy, but I am attempting to refine myself. Removing the imperfections, using Christ as a model. Striving for His approval, knowing that I am incapable of achieving that only by my works. If I am to sit at His table, I must show love, compassion, and genuine concern for people who I can help.

As a young man, I thought that my own abilities would carry me through life and allow me to overcome any obstacle. Working as a sexton in a larger church is still refining me. Seeing another part of the ministry and how the ministry works. I have the opportunity to learn as I grow in my role as a church leader. I have been mostly focused on the buildings and how to make crumbling walls stand up again. But now I enjoy bringing the word of Christ as I have been called to preach. I hope to be able to bring stability and guide the body of the church while being guided by the Spirit.

After volunteering at the church and becoming involved, I was called to fill a need to educate the world on Christ's workings and how His saving grace impacted my life. I was drawn to become a lay minister when I saw a need for ministers as Murray Hill Presbyterian Church struggled to find consistent help through the Stated Supply. Upon realizing that there was a bigger need for teachers of the Word, I applied to Austin Seminary in January 2019 and completed my certificate in 2021.

And I seek Him as I travel through this world, focusing my life's work now on refining myself by using the scripture as the source of power and this world as the example of the dregs that I must cast off.

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Attempting to refine myself in such a way as to reflect Christ. I know it will not be an exact representation of Him but my only prayers are to live my life in the way that He has taught us. To follow Him as his disciple and to live my life dedicated to glorifying the name of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. I await his return.

Even though I fail to resist temptation, I know that Christ will be there for me. He is the rock of the earth and even though I drive in the nail time and again with the hammer of my sins, he does not break. He is there for me and will continue to love me. I have learned not to be timid but to be humbly bold.

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Faith Statement

By Jesse Bozeman

I believe that God created Heaven, earth and all that is seen and unseen.

I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. I also believe in a Triune God where Jesus Christ came to this earth to fulfill a prophesy of the new covenant between God and humanity. To suffer for the guilt of each of our sins. I believe that He was born of the Virgin Mary and that He lived His life in a sinless manner. He performed miracles while He was here on earth so that we may know God because our tendency is of disbelief. He did not do them in a manner as to say, "Hey look at me." But He did them in a way that was only to bring attention to the power, glory, and existence of God our Father forever. As the creator of everything, God most certainly will be in existence after all things that we know have crumbled.

God is a Triune God. One in the same with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus truly was fully human and fully divine as He died on the cross for the forgiveness sin from the beginning to the end. I believe that, as Jesus said in Mark 8:31 he was resurrected after three days, and He sits at the right hand of God. And there He will judge as He knows what is in our hearts. I believe that He has true power over the earth, Heaven and hell.

When we speak of one, we are speaking of all three. As Jesus said, it will be revealed to you through the Spirit and then it will seem crystal clear. Until you allow the power of the Word that is Christ to enlighten you, you will remain skeptical. Once you humble yourself and allow the Spirit to work, your minds and hearts will open then you will see and understand these scriptures of which Christ speaks.

Jesus said, I am with you now, but soon you will not be able to see me, but don't be discouraged because I will be with you by the power of the Holy Spirit. You will be given insight as to what the Father sent me to do. Do not be afraid, for the Spirit is a friend to guide you and to teach you so that you will know what is true.

I feel that when the Holy Spirit's power is felt, we will know that our friend Jesus is the truth that is working in our life. That is when His Spirit has the power to open doors and put light on the dark places in our souls. The parts that we have attempted to hide from Christ. I know that God has numbered every hair on our heads and every cell in our bodies. My quandary is why we still think that we can shadow things from Christ's vision. Things that are not righteous in his sight. We as humans tend to say, "I am merely human, what do you expect of me?" But God has put the Holy Spirit in us. We are infused

with the likeness of Christ and created by the one true God. So therefore, God expects us to strive to be like the Lord and not accept our humanness.

We do not deserve God's grace, or God's forgiveness but God seeks us out to tell us that Jesus loves us anyway. Even though we try to push Our Lord away, God is always there like a mother with a loving hand or a father with a firm grip. The Holy Spirit is nurturing us and guiding us a mother does while she is nursing her child. Helping us through the hard parts of our lives. Comforting us with the only warmth that the embrace of a parent can bring.

I believe that scripture lays out what is expected of us and teaches us about Christ's life here on earth. As the Book of Order says in W-1.0106, "Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith."

I believe that the sacraments are the word of God that speak of the acts of Christ and His working in the people of the world for their rebirth. We must die to this world, sin and all worldly things and be reborn by freely giving our lives to our Lord and Savior. Bringing the people to a common worship over common elements, bread, water, wine. Creating the body of the church, people seeking God through Christ. We participate in them to show our gratitude and remind us of His sacrifice and to commune with the saints of old and those yet to come.

I believe that the Church is supposed to be a pillar to the community. Its goal is to break down barriers and social walls. The Church should teach people to lift others less fortunate and show them love and hope. The Church should give witness to the word. The Church is not a building; it is not fancy furniture. It is a place where our hearts can come together over scripture and draw on the Holy Spirit and the mystery that is our Triune God.

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Statement of Faith

I believe in the one triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I believe in God the creator of the heavens and the earth and all creatures therein.

I believe in Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human, our Savior and redeemer, made flesh by the Holy Spirit, who lived and died for us, and was raised from the dead into new and eternal life. He is the Son of God who lived to spread the gospel of grace and died for our sins. Through his reconciling work we are brought into a new relationship with God.

I believe in the Holy Spirit who is within all people whether recognized or not and moves within the Church catholic and apostolic. This Spirit empowers our faith, reminds us of our baptisms, and ignites the love of God in us.

I believe God created humankind in the divine image and yet we, tempted with sin, fall from our relationship with God. The biblical stories of God's wrath and love lead me to experience a God who is both merciful and demanding. We see this love and demand in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ who loves us and yet calls us into obedience. The Holy Spirit moves us to be in relationship with the love and demand of God and the Son.

I believe that humanity fell from God's perfect image into sin. Sin is what separates humankind from the divine. In order to overcome our sin, God gave us one that was both wholly human and wholly divine. God sent God's Son, born by the Virgin Mary, as one in both of these natures to live in the flesh among us, to teach us about grace and redemption through reconciliation. Jesus suffered death, and then rose in power and in the process atoned for our sin. Jesus's new covenant with the world granted humanity the opportunity for reconciliation through the means of grace. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, humanity is redeemed and made whole in love.

I believe the Church is called through Christ in Spirit and Word to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. It is one in relationship to the one and only God and Christ the son, our savior. The Church is holy, as a body set apart yet within the world by Christ, to serve the will of God and bear witness to the love and grace of God. The Church is catholic because just as Christ's life, death, and resurrection demonstrate love and acceptance that overcomes alienation through the grace of God, the Church strives to embrace all people and beings in all times, places, and situations of life. The Church is apostolic because it receives the good news of Christ through the works of the Spirit in the faithful interpretation of the Word. All who profess their faith and desire to be in community belong or have a place in the Church.

I believe the Church is reforming and always to be reformed. As the societies of the world grow, shift, and change, God's love does not change for us, but our understandings of connection and our practices must move with the world while remaining connected to the triune God.

I believe in the frequent practice and remembrance of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. In participation of the sacraments we remember the love, grace, and relationship we are called to witness to in God. In baptism, we are proclaimed children of God and are charged to share and live in the love of God with others and in the world. In the presence of the Spirit in the Eucharist we are called to be one body in Christ, remembering God's grace and renewed by the love of Christ.

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I believe the Scripture to be divinely inspired. I believe the word to be a true account of God's revelations and actions in the world. I understand the Spirit to be present whenever the word is read or heard. I believe the words of Scripture to be living and therefore always moving within and around us. Although their sound may fade away in time, the words themselves always live in our hearts and minds. The Spirit helps us to interpret and put the inspirations of the word into action and mission in the world around us.

I believe God calls us by name to witness to God's love in the world. We understand this calling to be a summons to see ourselves as God's children and to live each day as disciples of Jesus Christ.

References

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At this time I am not searching publicly. Please ask for more references and I will happily supply them to you. Thank you for your consideration.

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Rev. Emily K. Béghin's Journey of Faith

I could easily make a list on a timeline of the milestones of faith that each church-going believer hits... my baptism, membership changes, confirmation, etc... but this would serve only as a list of boxes checked and checkpoints met. Faith is deeper than the ceremonies and traditions we have made to celebrate it. Faith is what is woven into the base codes of our beings and it drives our sense of purpose.

My faith, at its core rests in a cosmic understanding of God as Creator. God, who transcends time and space also creates and breathes through all things that we are surrounded by. When I was a little girl, my father used to take time to show me nature and he taught me to treat all living things as sacred and beloved by God, but also to marvel at their intricacies. With learning of the living things came lessons also of death as a part of life. I remember learning death as a stillness. Animals and people alike would become still and their color would fade as though no one was home anymore to turn the light on inside. I asked my father, where do they all go? He told me of God's special place where we will all be together someday, but until then we should appreciate the time we are given with one another here in this special place. Time changed for me in that conversation and my life was never again the same.

My faith journey has many elements, made of small moments that have built a profoundly deep theology within me, but the driving force behind why I am a pastor seems to be rooted in death, suffering, and the hope and faith that God has called us to be compassionate always-- that others may know love without doubt through even the darkest of times.

In college, three of my high school friends died suddenly: one committed suicide, one fell from a 10th story balcony, and one was overdosed with heroine by someone close to him. These three horrific deaths filled me with a deep grief and a sense of disorientation. I was not yet 22 years-old and they never saw their 21st birthdays. At the time, I was working in a juvenile prison as a psychological intern. The inmates were just kids... kids who had been guided wrongly by adults they thought they could trust, and they did awful things. I wanted to help them. What I found is they craved to hear that they mattered, that someone believed in them, and that life could get better. They starved for compassion and to be seen as human beings. My heart broke.

When I attended the funerals of my friends after my internship, I saw a similar need being expressed by the mothers of the deceased. One mother was dealing with regret, guilt, and shock... if only. If only he had known he could turn to her... if only he knew it could get better, that he didn't need drugs, that someone cared for him... These were the words that stuck with me as I processed my own grief. Seeking guidance, I visited my home pastor and he asked me how I would like to spend my one precious life. I told him that I did not want another youth to ever feel lost or unloved. This was when he told me it was time to recognize my call to pastoring. He passed on three months later after battling cancer.

These last 8 years in ordained ministry I have seen a great many moments of suffering, hardship, joy, and love. It has been a privilege to be in the lives of others and to sit with them in their most vulnerable moments. My core sense of call is still the same, that I should use my gifts so no person is inclined to doubt love or feel too alone to seek help getting through darkness or pain. God is all things and in all things, but God calls us to be agents of healing, grace, love, and kindness... compassion.

My faith is fed in small moments of ordinary life. I still experience despair and often struggle to care for my own soul. I still know deep sadness and hopelessness at times, but these feelings do not define me. That is what sits at the heart of hope... that the beauty of God has made each of us beautiful and no one feeling or perspective can invalidate that. Within us, God lives and breathes and we call that presence the Spirit. Without faith, without hope, we lose a part of us and fail to recognize the beauty of the wholeness God has given us. As a pastor, I naturally care for others better than I care for myself and this can sometimes lead me to periods of exhaustion, but this is something I prayerfully approach each day. My faith guides me to value myself within the realm of the created as sacred and beloved too. Faith is the recognition that we are not our own, but are called to be more than we ever imagined in the eyes of love that speaks through all things and from all times. Hope is that grace will prevail over our flaws and love will heal life's wounds. From this

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understanding, as a part of God's kingdom building and beautiful creation, I am called to serve and live and love.

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Statement of Faith

Rachel McNeal

I believe that the God I worship is the creator of the cosmos. That same God is triune - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe God is the creator of all things, and that God created all people in God's own image. I believe that Jesus is the son of God, born to Mary, fully human, and fully divine. I believe the Holy Spirit is our advocate, moving in and among us, speaking to us, holding us, and emboldening us. I believe that God loves life; therefore our lives as Christians on Earth should promote the lives and wellbeing of all people.

I believe Jesus came to announce the coming Kingdom of God and came to Earth as God incarnate, to redeem the world. I believe Jesus died on the cross, crucified by the Roman Empire in the ultimate act of saving grace for all, so that all people may have eternal life. I believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven and will return again.

I believe Christians are called to be "little Christs" in the world - loving justice and pouring out the grace of Christ wherever we go. I believe the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ is limitless and that Christ's heart is for the poor and hungry, and those we often deem unlovable.

I believe that scripture, is authoritative. It is a source of wisdom and understanding. God gave people the ability to understand scripture in partnership with reason, through the lens of love. I believe, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and humble hearts, scripture is a source for understanding the heart and will of God.

I believe the Church is the body of Christ, a place to call home for the people of God; called to act as a shining beacon of peace, justice, mercy, grace and love. I believe the Church often fails, and is called to humility and repentance, just as people are. I believe the Church is to be welcoming of all people, to love all people, and to serve all people.

I believe that the sacraments of the Church are baptism and holy communion. These sacramental acts keep our identities grounded in the life and love of Jesus. Baptism is an act of worship and a sign of our renewal and of the transforming love of Jesus. In Baptism, God claims us as God's beloved and enfolds us into the covenantal community of the church - Christ's body - sealing this covenant with Christ's grace. Holy Communion, is a sign of God's welcome. We do not earn a place at Christ's table, rather we are invited as we are. Partaking of the cup of salvation, and the bread the body of Christ, is an act of gratitude in response to God's grace, and in it we are sealed in the redeeming love of Christ Jesus. It is an act of community - partake in Christ's body, as Christ's body. These sacraments are vessels of the Holy Spirit to move and elevate our lives to union with Christ. They are unifying acts for the Church universal and remind us that as Presbyterians we do not own the Gospel, but are unified through sacraments with Christ and with our brothers and sisters in Christ, throughout the world.

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Rachael McNeal
Journey of Faith

My earliest memories are of church, and of my mother praying before the sun. I often snuck downstairs to watch her. My home growing up often felt chaotic, but church and times of prayer in our home brought an often-craved for peace. I grew up attending Christian Community Church North (CCCN) in Columbus, Ohio. It was a vibrant multi-cultural place with people from 6 of the 7 continents counted among the congregation. Brightly colored flags from all over the world hung in our sanctuary. CCCN was a non-denominational charismatic evangelical church, born out of a coffee shop on The Ohio State's campus in the midst of the Jesus Movement of the 1970s. It was there that I learned church was like a home or a family. That I had many aunts and uncles in Christ who loved me and cared for me and were invested in my life and my faith. I learned to love scripture, and grew up knowing Jesus had a special call for my life, and to have an active and energetic prayer life.

It was also in that church home that I was taught shame. That the body is a shameful thing, that it is my responsibility to save those around me, and that I was to be a helpmeet for my future spouse. In high school, it was decided that my newly hired youth minister, Alesha, would be called "Director of Youth Ministry" instead of "Pastor of Youth Ministry" as the men who held that position were called previously. Upon learning this, I remember feeling like I saw my church in a new light. How could it be that a woman could not be called pastor? Were we not spiritually gifted just as men?

This became the catalyst for more big questions. Can I maintain my faith and still believe science? Can I maintain my faith and welcome people who are LGBT+? Can I keep my faith and perhaps be a woman in vocational ministry? Flagler College held me in my time of questions as I entered college. I studied religion/philosophy and youth ministry. I learned that the people of God do not always theologically agree. I learned that's okay. I learned questions are a sign of deep faith and longing for God, and that they didn't inherently mean I was denying God. At the end of high school I felt God calling me to ministry, but was unsure of what that meant. College left me more unsure, and so my professors encouraged me to go to seminary.

At Princeton Theological Seminary, in the pews of the Seminary Chapel, I witnessed a woman preach for the first time in my life. I was brought to tears. I cannot tell you what she said, only that I knew the Holy Spirit was using that moment to show me something that I still did not quite understand. If God created humans in God's image, male and female God created them, then had I been missing out on a chunk of God's voice all these years of hearing only one gender in the pulpit?

I struggled with my mental health throughout my life, but God continued to show up. Offering me grace and love through the voice of others, and in the quiet spaces of my conversations with the Divine. I experienced loss and grief and change and transition, and at every turn Christ showed up, offering me respite. Because of my constant encounter with God's grace throughout college and through seminary, I knew I wanted to continue serving Jesus, but that a non-denominational evangelical setting was not going to be the right place for me.

I interned at a Presbyterian church my last year of seminary. I suddenly felt at home in this community of faith. The emphasis on grace. The emphasis on loving others by serving others. The emphasis on worship not just as music, but as a whole, as liturgy. I was home.

Christ has called me to make a home for others. A place of belonging. A place where they can use their gifts and talents to serve God, and others. Christ continues to teach me more and more about the breadth and depth of his Kingdom. The true breadth and depth of his welcome. The true breadth and depth of his love. He finds me in silence, and in the chaotic movement of my day. He finds me at the sink washing dishes, and in the bathroom as I help my children bathe. He finds me when I am texting with a young person from our church about school drama, and when I'm at the lectern leading liturgy. Christ finds me. Even when I am not seeking, Christ finds me.