"The Nicene Creed: History"
Mark 6:1-13, II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10
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What was your favorite subject in school? As I got older my interest switched from the sciences to history. I guess I began to be more interested in *why* things were the way they were, how they came to be that way, and not just in how things worked. That was especially true in college and seminary. I loved my church history classes and that's one reason why I've been interested in looking at the Nicene Creed. Not just about what it says, but why it says what it does. What made them use those words? What was it in response to, what was going on in their lives? History is important to Christians because we are a historical faith. So is Judaism and so is Islam. But there are other faiths around the world that do not take history with the same seriousness. As Frederick Buechner says,

> "the biblical view is that history is not an absurdity to be endured or an illusion to be dispelled or an endlessly repeating cycle to be escaped. God took it seriously enough to begin it and to enter it and to promise that one day he will bring it to a serious close. It is for each of us a series of crucial, precious, and unrepeatable moments that are seeking to lead us somewhere."[1]

As Christians we claim to be an historic faith. We claim that Jesus was an historical person, that Paul and Peter were real people who 2000 years ago, lived and walked and preached throughout the Roman Empire. We claim that these texts that we read every Sunday and some of us every day, were written near the time of the life of Jesus by people who knew something about him. That's really what the second clause of the Creed is all about. They made claims about who he was and what he did. The Creed says:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

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1 Buechner, Frederick. *Listening to Your Life.* p. 251.

That's the part that speak about who Jesus is. But the next part talks about history:

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
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.

This places Jesus in a particular time and place in the history of the world: in ancient Palestine, during the time when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. And certain things happened to him during his life. He was born in Bethlehem, he lived in Nazareth, his mother was Mary, he was crucified as a young man in Jerusalem by the authorities. We believe that God raised him from death and that many witnesses saw him. We claim that these were historical occurrences. They are basic to our faith. They are the most important things about Jesus life. That's *his* history.

Well…maybe…

I've been thinking a lot this year about obituaries. I'm sure that says something about the difficult spring we have had and the people that are no longer here with us. My father-in-law passed away in April, and then Murray Cooper in May, and Tom Ryan last month and others in our congregational family, still others from my life and from yours that maybe most of us don't even know about. Somehow this year feels…personal.

I'm often asked by loved ones, "what kind of thing do I put in the obituary?" And frankly, the typical

proforma obituary is pretty dry: name, age at time of passing, birthplace, parents, spouse, kids, predeceased by, etc. you know the drill…

Maybe we prefer it to be that way? People don't need to know too much about us…

I don't know, what do you think? What would you want someone to say about you? Just the facts of your life? If you were going to write your history, if you were going to write down the basic facts of your life, what would you say? Where you were born, year, parents, siblings, all the things we just listed. Or maybe you might say where you went to school, what kind of career you had, hobbies. Still we'd keep things pretty basic and simple. That's your history.

But let's face it, it doesn't even begin to scratch the surface. After reading those facts, does someone really know you? Well…no, but what are you supposed to say instead? That he died $50,000 in debt, or that she hasn't spoken to her sister in 20 years, should we print our political views? Our health struggles? Our deepest thoughts about the world, our belief in God, our fears of dying?

We wouldn't expect to see all those things written up in an obituary, and that's probably ok, everyone doesn't need to know all that. But some of those things make us who we are. What is it that makes us who we are?

If someone was going to stand up at your funeral and share about you, would they just read out those things? Is that how they experienced the person who was you? They may know what you did, but do those facts say why you did what you did? Do they say anything about the real turning points of your life? Maybe no one really knows about those, but they will know the results, they will know what kind of person you are, even more that the dry facts that were printed in your obituary.

We read this morning about King David and when he was enthroned as king of all Israel. Is that the biggest moment of his life? Is that what appears in his obituary? Is that what made him who he was?

Or was it something else? Was it the day that he stepped out in faith as a young man and in spite of his weak knees he defied the Philistine champion Goliath? Or was it a different day? Was it a day when he was all alone with his father's flocks and a lion came creeping around looking for an easy meal and it would have been easy for him to let the lion take one of the sheep without a fight, but he didn't? Or was it later when he became friends with the king's son Jonathan and he realized that he had made the best friend of his life, because they loved each other even though there were so many reasons that they should be rivals? Again, Frederick Buechner says that the true history of humanity, and the "true history of each individual has less to do that we tend to think with the kind of information that gets into most histories, biographies, and autobiographies. True history has to do with the saving and losing of souls, and both of these are apt to take place when most people including the one whose soul is at stake are looking the other way."[2]

We also read this morning about Jesus going back to his home in Nazareth. The people there knew him, right? They knew who his mother was and where he had gone to school and who his brothers and sisters were. But did they know him? Did they know what motivated him? Did they know what was in his heart? So when he acted differently than they expected, they were upset, they took offence at him. Who does this guy think he is, acting so high and mighty? We know him, he's not all that he thinks he is. They knew his history, but did they know his real history? They had watched him grow up, but did they know about the nights spent in prayer, wondering about this call from God? Did they know what was in his heart when Mary and Joseph would speak to him about the night of his birth? Did they hear what he heard the day he was baptized in the river by his cousin John? Were they with him during those forty days of struggle in the wilderness, deciding could he really do this? Aren't those the days that made Jesus who he was? Aren't those the days that set him on the path to Jerusalem so those things in the Creed could happen?

The days that save our souls, or lose them, are not the days that appear in a life history or in an

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2 Buechner, p. 251-2.

obituary. They are an accumulation of days, they are a growing into who we are supposed to become, they are simple decisions, creating the character of the person we are.

What are those days for you? They may be days that no one knows about, just you and God. It may be the day you went hiking in the mountains by yourself. It may be the day you said yes to going on the picnic with those friends who you really didn't know all that well. It may be picking up that book that you always thought you should finally get around to reading. It's finally going to church with your mother on the fifteenth time she asked. It's telling your friend "I really appreciate what you do," just because she needs to hear it. It's helping out when you really do have better things to do. It's finding your grandfather's gravesite after all these years and going to visit even though no one else in your family is really interested. It's telling a teenager, "I'm really proud of you," even when you aren't even related to them. It's deciding that even though it would be fun to share that story and it would get a laugh, it will also hurt someone and so you don't. It's deciding that loving is more important than being loved.

Those may be the days that save your soul. Those are the days that make you who you are. And those are the days that when someone stand up at your funeral, they will talk about far more than any other worldly accomplishment.

Those are the days, those are the decisions that turn your heart toward God, that turn your heart toward loving one another.

What are the days that made you? What are the days that saved your soul? Maybe it's today.

the time, but maybe turning point that turn our heart toward or away from God, toward or away from one another.