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Scripture: We Believe ~ Statement 1&2

In November of 2019, Chloe Swarbrick stood to address her colleagues in the New Zealand Parliament, a daunting task given that she is just 25 years of age and one of the youngest Members of Parliament.

She said to those gathered, “In the year 2050, I will be 56 years old; yet, right now, the average age of this Parliament is 49 years old.” She went on to emphasize that the burden of dealing with a climate crisis will fall on her generation and those who come after her.

She was just 40 seconds into the speech explaining her concern for the future of the planet when an older member of parliament heckled and jeered her about her age and without skipping a beat, Swarbrick retorted, *OK Boomer* and then continued with her remarks. The video of this moment went viral and was viewed by millions of people around the world. What was the big deal? Are you aware of these expression, *OK Boomer*?

This dismissive catchphrase has become a comeback for members of the Millennial, and Generation Z who are using it to shut down what they see as patronizing opinions from people of the Baby Boomer generation, which includes me. It is their answer to us, when they see us rolling our eyes and saying, “kids these days” or “those millennials and their participation ribbons”. It is the latest shot fired in the ongoing gap that exists between those who were raised with certain values and beliefs from one generation to the next.

I have been really pondering this whole area of beliefs lately, and what it is that plays a role in

shaping what we believe. Maybe it has been sparked by some of the recent events of the world and the fact that my perspective and interpretation of what goes on around me is filtered through the lens of a middle aged white guy. As I am engaging with more and more people who may look and think differently than me, I am beginning to see just how entrenched my beliefs can be.

Beliefs are the assumptions we hold to be true and they can take root because of the way that we were raised and from life experience. Can you think of some of the things that you believe in?

As a Canadian society, we would all probably say that we believe in equality and justice. We believe in respect and openness to diverse thoughts and opinions. We believe in compassion and care for humanity.

How what we believe gets lived out in our lives is what may vary from generation to generation or from household to household depending on your personal experiences or perspective. That is what can lead to tension.

Although they were all raised in the same home with the same values and beliefs, some of my children and I have some pretty interesting conversations around the topic of politics because they have chosen a different political party and leader than Carolyn and I have traditionally voted for. Some of their beliefs are different because now as young adults, their perspective is different.

What we believe can be a source of division and controversy in our society, but you would think that the church would be immune to that tension because *belief* is what we do best. It is what we specialize in. But this whole area of, *what we believe* has actually been a source of great dismay and disunity throughout the history of the church.

Let me explain. In the first few centuries after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the church really struggled to put a stake in the ground and proclaim the essential truths of the scriptures. *This is what we believe*. It was hard for them. As a result, much false teaching and heresy began to spread. To try and combat this, little “think tank” groups called councils were assembled made up of leaders of the churches where Christianity was spreading and they

formulated creeds. Now this term “creed” comes from the Latin word “credo” which means, “I believe”. These councils formulated statements of what they believed. As you can imagine, given the nature of humanity, there was much disagreement and discrepancy in the compilation of these creeds so that many churches began to pull away from each other and separations occurred.

Perhaps the most famous of these, was the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century which led to the split of Protestantism from the Catholic Church. This was also the beginning of what we call *denominations*. They include Anabaptist, Brethren, Calvinist, Lutheran, Methodist and Pentecostal among so many others. Each denomination was made up of groups of churches that had their own distinctive beliefs and practices. North Park Church emerged from the Protestant branch but since its origin in 1964, the leaders chose intentionally not to be affiliated with any denomination. We’re non-denominational and the desire of the people who first started this church was to emphasize our commonality with other churches instead of our points of disagreement. In doing so, the hope was to reinforce what we believe across social/economic, cultural and generational lines so that expressions like, *OK Boomer*, would not have to be uttered in this church. I don’t think it has quite worked out that way!

Welcome to the launch of our fall season at North Park. Although things may look and feel a little bit different this year, we are still excited for what God is going to do in and through his church in the days ahead. Today, we begin a sermon series that we have entitled, ***We Believe. Exploring Our Statement of Faith.***

Given all the change and uncertainty going on in our world today, we thought it would be good to remind ourselves of what we believe as a church. What are our essential truths and how do they impact the way that we live, serve and engage with our community around us?

At North Park, we have a Statement of Faith, which is an explanation of what we believe. As far as I know, North Park has had a Statement of Faith for as long as it has been in existence but last year, the Elder Board decided it was time to revisit this

document to ensure that it represented our current reality.

So, some staff, elders and members of our congregation with extensive theology training were recruited and spent a number of weeks combing over the wording and making changes where needed. It was then presented to the elder board and the congregation for approval and it now serves as the statement of what North Park Church believes.

I want to thank the group of people that devoted some much time and expertise to this project and I want to especially thank Dr. Terry Tiessen for the excellent commentary he compiled that describes in greater detail the back story to each of our statements of belief. Much of the content that I will be using for these sermons in this series comes from that commentary, so I want to give credit where credit is due.

Over the next five weeks, I want to break down our Statement of Faith and explore the points in a little more detail but I thought it may be helpful to actual begin by reading the entire statement so that you are familiar with it. It can be found on our North Park web site under the *About* heading and then clicking on to the *Mission, Vision and Values* page. If you scroll down from there, you will find our Statement of Faith.

North Park, this is what we believe.

North Park is a non-denominational Christian church. With the whole Church, we affirm The Apostles’ Creed and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

We believe...

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God’s original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, was born of the Virgin Mary, is truly divine and truly human, yet is without sin.

Jesus died in our place, reconciling sinful humanity to God, and offers salvation as a gift received by faith.

Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is the mediator between humanity and God the Father.

The Holy Spirit, who is the eternal Spirit of God, leads people to repentance, lives in them, and is transforming them to be more like Jesus.

The Church is made up of all believers, who are adopted into the family of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to worship God, build one another up, share the gospel, and promote justice and love in the world.

The writings of the Old and New Testaments comprise the divinely inspired, fully trustworthy, supreme and sufficient authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom.

Hopefully there is nothing here that catches you by surprise but instead it encourages you and prompts you to want to hear more and learn more about what we believe. I did just want to say a few things about the preamble in the Statement,

North Park is a non-denominational Christian church.

We talked about that already.

With the whole Church, we affirm The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

The Apostles' Creed, which begins, *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;* and the Nicene Creed which begins, *We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen;* are two creeds, written within a few hundred years of Jesus death and resurrection.

They were affirmed by all the churches before all the splits and divisions that took place and they remain an important part of the faith of the Protestant Church.

Both creeds clearly define the core belief in a Trinitarian God that He is three in one; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the preamble to our Statement of Faith declares, we, at North Park affirm *The Apostles' Creed*

and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

We sing a worship song here regularly that is a variation of these creeds. It is entitled, *I believe.*

North Park's own Statement of Faith has nine distinct statements that form the foundation of our Christian belief derived from the bible. Today, I want to look at the first two statements.

Statement #1

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

On August 7, 1961, a twenty-six-year old Russian cosmonaut became the second Soviet to be fired into space, orbit the earth and return safely. When he returned, he let it be known that while he was in space, he looked around for this God that people talked about and he could not see him. We know that we live in a world that is skeptical about the existence of God, don't we?

In the summer of 1925 in a small mountain town in Tennessee, a legal trial took place that made headlines around the world. It wasn't a court case over a crime of passion, or a custody dispute or a will or trust. It didn't involve special prosecutors or a grand jury. The subject of the trial was the very origin of life. It is known in the history books as the "Scopes Trial". A young biology teacher, John T Scopes was charged with violating the law in Tennessee stating that you could not teach evolution.

It was a battle between Evolution and Creationism and it would be a turning point in the education system as it opened the door for evolution to become an accepted scientific theory of how human beings and all of life developed and came into being. More and more in our society, the biblical idea of a God creating is seen as a view that is unscientific and out of touch with the real world.

In the past, Christianity's rebuttal for those who didn't believe in the existence of God or that he created the heavens and the earth, was to cite the bible. Which was futile because if these people did not believe in God, they most certainly did not put much stock in the bible. More and more however, the very science that

evolutionists used to support their claims is uncovering evidence for a divine creator.

You all may be familiar with the “Big Bang” theory. I am talking about the scientific hypothesis not the television show. This theory stated that at one time, all matter was packed into a dense mass at temperatures many trillions of degrees. Then around 14 billion years ago, there was a huge explosion. From that explosion, all the matter that today forms our planets and stars was born and the universe as we know it, was created. In the 1990’s, a satellite known as *COBE*, unearthed findings that any sort of cosmic explosion that may have occurred throughout history was outside the laws of physics. It was not a natural phenomenon but a supernatural one.

Dr. Robert Jastrow, a professor of Astronomy at both Columbia University and Dartmouth College and director of NASA’s Institute for Space Studies made the following comment in regard to the *COBE* research, “Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world”. More and more we are seeing that science is validating the notion of intelligent design.

Which brings us now to the bible. What is the biblical origin of creation? What do we believe?

Genesis 1:1
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Immediately we are introduced to the main character of the biblical narrative. It’s God, and everything and everyone else has their life and breath and being in Him. *God created the heavens and the earth.*

Whether you hold a young earth creationism point of view which means you believe that God created the earth in six, 24 hour days. Or you are on the other end of the spectrum, and believe in theistic evolution which suggests there was a gap of perhaps millions of years in God’s creation, neither view has to undermine the purpose or authority of scripture.

The main point that has to be grasped is that God is behind creation. God started with nothing and created all that we see and even that which we cannot see. Once we agree with that, quite frankly,

God can do what he wants whether it is over a million years or a split second.

Genesis chapters 1-2 actually has less to do with the science of creation and more to do with embracing the view of God as creator.

And beginning at Genesis 1:3, we see God’s process of creation presented poetically and artistically. Day 1, God created Light and dark. Day 2, he created Sky and water. Day 3, he created land. Day 4, the sun, moon and stars. Day 5, the birds and sea creatures. Day 6 Animals and human beings and on Day 7, he rested.

And if you read through Genesis chapter 1, you will notice a repetitive phrase used to describe each act of God’s creation? And God saw that it was good. Seven times this phrase is used to describe God’s creative works in the first chapter of Genesis. It was good.

Do you know the only time, the text says, that creation was not good?

Genesis 2:18
The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

So God created woman to be a partner for man and it was good. And all of us men have been praising God ever since. Do I hear an Amen?!

That is the magnificent creation of God.

We believe: **There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is,**

Colossians 1:17 says,
He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

And we also believe that this true God; ***exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.***

This is the theological doctrine known as the Trinity. God is three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This concept has perplexed Christians and non-Christians for generations. How can God be three in one? When I

was growing up, I had it explained to me in all sorts of ways. God is like water, with three states, liquid (water) gas (steam) and solid (ice). Or God is like a hardboiled egg; hard shell, egg white and yellow yoke all in one. Three in one. It almost created more confusion. This is a tough concept to grasp so it may come as no surprise to us that it took almost 350 years after Jesus had resurrected from the dead, ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to his followers, for the church to reach some sort of a consensus about the way that they should speak about the Trinity.

Remember, for centuries God's people in the bible had always affirmed the *oneness* of God. It is found all throughout scripture. In the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 6:4

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God,
the LORD is one.*

In the New Testament, it says in,

1 Timothy 2:5

*For there is one God and one
mediator between God and mankind, the
man Christ Jesus,*

It was so important to affirm the oneness of God because in the ancient days, God's people were surrounded by nations that worshipped many gods. Idolatry was a major problem in the bible.

But, the early church was confronted with one of the great mysterious of the Christian faith, how could God be both one and three? To worship three in one, isn't that idolatry?

To try and get this right, in the 4th century 318 representatives of the global church grappled with it and their conclusion is captured wonderfully in the Nicene Creed. It says,

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and
unseen.*

*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.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of
life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father
and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.*

It is important make a few points here and be mindful of the fact, that I am spending just a couple of minutes on something that has been studied, researched and debated for centuries.

Firstly, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for understanding God's existence before creation as we talked about earlier. That is why it is a non-negotiable in what we believe.

Secondly, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to revelation. If Jesus Christ is not God, he could not know or reveal God.

Jesus says to one of his disciples in,

John 14:7

*If you had really known me, you would know
who my Father is.*

Then he turns to Philip and says,

John 14:9

*Anyone who has seen me has seen the
Father!*

Here, Jesus distinguishes himself from the Father and at the same time, he is teaching the disciples that he so completely shares the nature of the Father that to know one is to know the other.

Thirdly, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to our redemption. If God is absolutely one, there would be no effective mediation between God and humanity. If Jesus was just a good man, even a perfect man, he could not be the bridge that restores us back into relationship with God that our sin has caused. He had to be God in order for his death to take the place of our death. Otherwise he would have just been a martyr. Do you see that?

Fourthly, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential because the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives would be impossible if he was not divine. Because the Spirit shares the very essence of the Father and Son, he is able to reproduce in us the character of the Son, who is the perfect image of the Father.

In *Galatians 5*, it says, let the Holy Spirit guide your life. It produces this kind of fruit; *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control*, those are the qualities of Jesus.

Finally, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for worship. We can worship the Son and the Spirit, as well as the Father because they are all, in their very essence, God.

We can sing to any of them, we can pray to any of them but the ancient form of worship taught us to speak to the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit which has formed the common doxology that we hear in the church today, *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*.

I know that our own Worship Pastor Jordan Elgie is very conscious of incorporating the components of the Trinity and Trinitarian theology into our regular worship experience at North Park. Take note of it in the words that we sing and the scriptures that are read each week.

In summary, here are three statements that we believe about the Trinity as a church,

1. God is one in his essential being.
2. God is also three in his essential being. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. The distinctive inter-personal relationships that exist within the Trinity are revealed in the particular ways they work within the world. Father is creator, Son is redeemer, Holy Spirit is the transformer through sanctification, or the act of making us holy.

Do you now see the importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity and why it is so important to what we believe as Christians? Even in that condensed explanation. Nothing distinguishes the God that we as Christians worship from the gods of all the other religions more clearly, than the Doctrine of the Trinity.

So that is an explanation of Statement #1 of what we believe at North Park Church:

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let's quickly move on to **Statement #2**.

God's original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

For this, we have to start in the Garden of Eden. The bible tells us that it was a beautiful oasis filled with vegetation and trees that were not only pleasing to the eye but also good for food. Into this garden, God places his crowning creative achievement, human beings. Adam and Eve.

They had everything they needed. They had food, a place to live, protection, and a purpose to live for. Of all that he created, God singled out two humans to build a relationship with, Adam and Eve.

His vision was to come and be with humanity in a beautiful garden of his creation. The Almighty God wants to be in relationship with us and it would only make sense that God would want to ensure that we in turn, want to be in relationship with Him. So he instilled something deep within our DNA that is different from the rest of creation. God gave humanity the freedom to choose. To make a decision whether or not, we desire to be in relationship with him.

Unfortunately, we know how the story of Adam and Eve plays out. They disobey God's command to not eat from the only tree in the garden He says is off limits. They exert their own will over God's and because of that one action, something changed in their nature. Sin was now running through their bloodstream. Sin. Sin is not a word you hear a lot lately, even in the church.

Maybe it is our postmodern culture, or maybe it is the fear that I would have someone yell out, *OK Boomer* if I brought up sin in a sermon. But we cannot negate sin when we are talking about our Christian beliefs. It is a game changer.

Sin in their lives means that Adam and Eve are now faced with a battle, a war within themselves between good and evil. I think we all know that feeling, the internal battle between good and evil because we too, face it every day. Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God in the Garden of Eden had consequences. The biggest by far was that God

banished Adam and Eve from the garden. From the place of relationship and community with Him. Sin, always has consequences. It separates us from God.

Which takes us to Genesis 4, where we are introduced to Adam and Eve's offspring, their two sons, Cain and Abel. As the story goes, they both brought offerings to the Lord. God looked with favor on Abel's offering but not on Cain's. So instead of bringing another offering, Cain just gets angry. So God says to him,

Genesis 4:6-7

"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Sin ruled over Cain that day, as he chose evil over good. He killed his brother out of spite and jealousy which signifies something very important. The sin nature, the internal battle between good and evil did not end with Adam and Eve in the garden. They passed it on to the next generation and it has been passed down to every generation ever since.

And this is a theme we see over and over in the bible and in our lives. When humanity chooses to live apart from God, to sin, the expressions of evil get worse and worse.

That is what is unfolding in these first few chapters of the bible. From Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God and eat from the tree, to Cain killing his own brother until it finally reaches a breaking point in Genesis 6 when things had gotten so outside the design and pattern God had in mind for His people, that He just has to step in. To intervene.

In *Genesis 6:5-6*, it says,

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

Can you possibly hear anything more disturbing than this? That the creator looked upon his creation and declared, *I regret that I ever made you*. It would be like a parent looking upon a child and declaring, *I wish you had never been born!*

The depravity of humanity had sunk so low at this point in time, that God regretted that he had ever made human beings at all. It wasn't so much anger that prompted this declaration as it was a deep sadness and grief at the state of his world.

So, God decides to send a flood so devastating that it would wipe out the entire human race and animal kingdom, with the exception of course of Noah, his family and their animals.

Sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

The Apostle Paul says in,

Romans 5:18 that

Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone,

In *Romans 6:23*, Paul is even blunter when he says, *the wages of sin is death,*

And that, is an explanation of Statement #2 of what we believe at North Park Church:

Statement #2.

God's original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

If we simply left it there, all hope seems lost. Have you ever lost hope? Hope that a better reality was possible? With God, hope is never lost. A better future is always possible in him because thankfully, the story of humanity doesn't end with condemnation and death, our death that is. If it had, we wouldn't be here. God wants us back. Back in relationship with him. God loves us so much that he will stop at nothing. He pursues us.

Which leads to the 3rd and 4th statements of what we believe in our Statement of Faith. God was already at work setting into motion a plan to save humanity from themselves. That is what I will address next week as will continue in this series.

I want to encourage you as in the coming weeks, this is a more theoretical preaching series and I am only scratching the surface of the depth of meaning

of these statements. Do some additional study on these topics, read a book, watch a podcast or talk with a friend or have a discussion in your small group.

It is important for you to get a deeper understanding because it is a declaration of what you and I, and this church believes and it should dictate the way that we live, the way that we love our neighbour and the way that we worship our Lord. **Amen?**

As a way to conclude our time together, can I invite you to read these first two statements with me again as a way of affirming that this is, what we believe.

Let's read them together, wherever you are.

North Park is a non-denominational Christian church. With the whole Church, we affirm The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

We believe...

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God's original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

This is what we believe. **Let's Pray.**

Points to Ponder

We Believe ~ Exploring our Statement of Faith

Statement 1 & 2

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Brainstorm some of the things that you believe in. Make a list of the values and beliefs you may hold strongly. Discuss how the way that you were raised or past experiences have played a significant role in what you believe.
2. In what ways does what you believe clash with what the culture around you believes? Have you ever experienced conflict because what you believe opposes what someone close to you believes? Describe the situation.

3. Have you ever been involved in a church where there was a significant difference in beliefs of the congregants? How was the situation resolved?
4. What is your understanding of God creating the heavens and earth? What have you been taught in the past? Do any of your beliefs around the creative work of God clash with your non-Christian friends? In what ways have you reconciled faith and science on this topic?
5. How does your understanding of the Trinity of God impact the way that you worship Him? Have you ever experienced confusion around this theological concept? What has helped you to understand it in a more meaningful way?
6. What is your understanding of Sin? Why is it so destructive to our relationship with God?
7. What does condemnation mean to you? Discuss with your group, why sin leads to death and condemnation.

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Invite God to give you a greater understand of what you believe and why you believe it. Read through the first two statements of what North Park believes as a church and ask God to give you clarity and faith to hold these statements as your belief as well.

Statement #1

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Statement #2

God's original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.