

Kathy Padilla

Statement of Faith (for 8/17/2024 Presbytery Meeting)

I believe God is the creator of all that exists, known and unknown. God's greatness is unfathomable. God transcends time and space; humans do not. God is the source of all life, all knowledge, all wisdom and all love. God is triune; that is, God exists in a community of God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. This is a mystery to humans.

I believe we are created to be in relationship with God. In our limitation, we ascribe human qualities to God in order to better understand God's nature. The predominant image I have of God is of the waiting father in the parable Jesus told which we call the Prodigal Son. This is an image of a patient, loving, forgiving parent who welcomes home the one who has wandered and who gently corrects and restores the one who is filled with resentment.

Jesus is the Savior, the one who took on human flesh and "moved into the neighborhood," in order to create a new covenant between humans and the Divine. Jesus is our primary teacher and exemplar. From Jesus we learn to pray, to love our neighbors, to lay down our lives for the sake of others. Jesus establishes the Church which, incredibly, is intended to extend the message of God's love and reconciliation to the world.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God unleashed among us to enable us to "dare greatly" and fulfill God's commands to love God with all our Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we have only ourselves to rely on, which ultimately ends in failure.

I believe sin is essentially selfishness taken to its natural outcome. I can love others because God loved me first and the Holy Spirit gives me that ability. But I can't love perfectly because I am selfish. I can behave selflessly for a time and in certain situations. But eventually, I come to the end of my strength and patience. This is common to all humans. We eventually give in to the temptation to put ourselves and our desires above all else. In this way, we alienate ourselves from the one who created and loves us, and we treat our neighbors as objects rather than brothers and sisters.

Jesus took away the everlasting fatal consequence of our sin through salvific death on the cross. God resurrected Jesus and gave the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we might cooperate with God in the work of reconciling all of creation to the Creator, God. This is a mystery.

Scripture helps us to understand God's nature and desire for our lives. Our Bible is a collection of history, poetry, prophecy and teaching, created and collected over many generations. A great deal of it was transcribed from oral tradition.

While every word may not be *factual*, (Did Satan and God have a conversation in which God gave Satan permission to test Job's loyalty?), I believe that the Scriptures contain *truth*. I think of it like a pointillist painting. Encyclopedia Britannica describes pointillism as "the practice of applying small strokes or dots of colour to a surface so that from a distance they visually blend together." The Bible is like that. Over centuries, experiences, ideas, and wisdom about God are shared and compiled. Taken one verse at a time, we do not see the whole picture. God is too magnificent for that. But if we step back and take in the sweep of history, we see revealed the story of a God who creates, loves, corrects, and redeems. It is a love story.