

**Sacred Mooring**  
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**1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 4:1-6**

Today begins our summer preaching and teaching series: *“Comfort in an Age of Anxiety”*. While every age faces the anxieties of their time, therapists are saying that they have never before experienced as many clients struggling with anxiety as they are encountering these days. There are all kinds of explanations for to this.

The fast-paced 24-hour news available to us fans the flames of our anxiety. Constant connection to our computers, phones and devices leaves us wired, weary and worn out. The crazy over-scheduling of our lives and our children’s lives is running us ragged. Divisive politics and worries about the future: for our personal well-being, the nation, the world and even for our planet is feeding our angst.

Feeling anxious goes hand in hand with an inability to handle uncertainty. Nitsuh Abebe, writer of an article called: *“America’s New ‘Anxiety’ Disorder”* in the 4/18/17 issue of the New York Times Magazine makes this point: *“What might make human beings less anxious, it seems is having a firmer sense of what in the world is happening and what’s likely to happen next. We seem temporarily short on both.”*

This summer we will be reflecting upon the comfort God offers us in this age of anxiety and unease about the present and the future. We’ll explore the intersection of faith with the realities and truth of our lives. We’ll seek to connect in deeper ways with the One who loves this world and us; with the loving God who holds the past, present and future. We will return to the sacred mooring of our lives with our faith through the Scriptures and the Heidelberg Catechism as a teacher of God’s Word.

It is not unusual these days to hear people to making up their own truths and facts. However, as followers of Jesus Christ we don’t get to do that. We cannot know our Christian faith apart from the holy tradition that has been passed along from generation to generation. Apart from our lives being moored to the core foundations of our faith, we’re left adrift on the currents of falsehoods and bad theology, that eventually beach us on distant shores of disappointment and disillusionment.

Years ago I went with Middle School youth from our church to a corn maze. After an hour or so of wandering through the maze, going in circles, some of the youth decided they’d had enough! They asked a guide, positioned on a high platform in the middle of the maze, to help them find the way out. The guide carefully told them what they needed to do and in what direction they needed to turn, in order to get to the exit.

They followed the guide’s directions . . . *for awhile*. And then . . . the second-guessing began! *“The guide said to turn left here. Yeah, but that doesn’t feel right . . .”* And that’s when a bunch of twelve year olds, who’d never navigated the corn maze in

their lives, decided that they knew better than the guide. And so they became the masters of their own destiny, winding up back where they'd first asked for directions a half hour earlier, still hopelessly lost!

Through the centuries and still today the creeds, confessions and catechisms of the Church serve as guides and teachers connecting us with God's Word as an alternative to our attempts to be masters of our own destiny, which never ends well. They are often written in times of division to unify the church around the pillars of our faith. Much of the New Testament was written in response to divisions and issues facing the early church to connect them with the sacred mooring of the good news in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and teaching them about what faithfulness looks like for those who follow Jesus.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is written to a church facing divisions and conflicts, who are drifting from the teaching on Jesus Christ that they've received from him. He reminds them to hold firmly to the good news he's shared with them and by which they are saved saying: *<sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.*

And in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus he addresses the divisions among them by reminding them of their life in Christ to which they've been called and of that which unifies them despite their differences: *<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

It's important for congregations and individuals in congregations to know what they believe and why they believe what they believe, especially as the Church continues today to wrestle with divisions and disagreements within itself. Through his letter to the Ephesians Paul encourages us to speak truth in love (4:15) by bearing witness to truth in Jesus Christ as we are grounded in deep humility. We don't possess the truth, but rather we're to be like John the Baptist and point to the truth in the person of the crucified and risen Christ.

Later in Ephesians Paul makes a contrast between children, who are *"tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine"* (4:14) and those who *"grow up"* (4:15) in faith and who in turn contribute to the building up of the body of Christ (4:16). Together our creeds, confessions and catechisms build a bridge from the Bible to the particular context in which the church finds itself.

Division and conflict have been with Christ's church from the very beginning. There was conflict between Peter and Paul over eating with uncircumcised Christians. There was the East-West Schism (1054) between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformation and the Post-Reformation brought further division within the church. A controversy over the Lord's Supper arose among Reformed churches following the Reformation. Out of this controversy, the

Heidelberg catechism was created to unify the divided churches, reminding them of the core foundations of their faith.

Theological divisions continue among Christ's followers. I do not agree theologically with some of my brothers and sisters in Christ, nor do they theologically agree with me. Yet, we cannot write one another off. We are still connected to Christ and to one another by our baptisms. Some of you arrived at Westminster after leaving churches where you no longer felt theologically in sync. And others have left Westminster over their theological differences with us.

My father, a lifelong Presbyterian, lives with my mother in a retirement community associated with the Anabaptist tradition. He regularly worships with that Christian community, but he refuses to join their church because they will not recognize his baptism as an infant and require him to be re-baptized in order to become a member. Despite the theological differences over baptism, he feels united with them in the foundation of his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the faith that was passed down to him by his parents who brought him to baptism and which he passed on to me when he brought me to be baptized many years ago.

This summer through reflections on Scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism we're invited to join in a conversation about faith, as we interact with the testimony of those who've gone before us as to the comfort and good news of the Gospel for those living in an age of anxiety. Whether you grew up in the church, or are new to the faith, or are someone who considers yourself spiritual but not religious come and join the conversation. We encourage you to bring your questions, insights, doubts and perspectives to the conversation as we reflect together upon life and death; faith and doubt, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate Westminster's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we recognize that today's church rests upon the faith and faithfulness of those who went before us. The baton is now passed to us. It is our turn to carry the faith; to grow up into Christ; to encounter the comfort and hope of Jesus Christ in our own lives so that we're enabled to pass it on to those coming behind us. This summer as we connect or re-connect our lives to the sacred mooring of our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, my prayer is this: that we as individuals and as the congregation will encounter the good news of Jesus Christ for ourselves and that in doing so, we then *become the good news*, for which an anxious age is eagerly yearning!

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.