

WHAT I BELIEVE NOW

the Rev. Seth Patterson

March 6, 2022, Confirmation Sunday

Minister for Spiritual Formation & Theater

Reading: “For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet,” Joy Harjo

Welcome, everyone, to this important day in the life of our church community! It has been an absolute joy and honor to spend the last year with these nine young people, these thoughtful and kind 9th graders. These are each people you should get to know better, and I encourage you to do so.

For the last year, we have been explorers together. We asked questions about ourselves and each other, we explored other religions and our own changing conceptions of God, we traced some of the lines of Christianity from Jesus until today. The capstone of this year was the writing of a *What I Believe Now* statement. Per the tradition of Plymouth, this writing was not a demonstration of a particular set of beliefs, but rather a way of naming what one believes right now, knowing that it will shift and change through life. This is a practice at a lifelong exercise. You will hear selections of these statements from each Confirmand shortly [and printed below].

While parent figures are the most important spiritual guides, each young person was assigned a Companion with whom to take this journey. These Companions took the first vulnerable step of naming publicly what they believe. They each wrote a statement and shared it with each other and the 9th graders. This was important for three reasons: Confirmation students shouldn't be the only ones expected to do this kind of work, it showed an important amount of mutuality and solidarity, and it hopefully demonstrated that not all adults believe the same things!

And with that, my brief message today is sharing my own *What I Believe Now* statement in solidarity with this group. This can be vulnerable, meaningful, complicated, frustrating, illuminating, and beautiful. I encourage you all to write down one page of what you believe right now and share it with someone. I would be honored to be that someone if you need a listening ear.

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I believe that nothing is more important than restoration, and that is my working definition of God.

I believe that God is beyond imagination and that no image can be formed and held. I believe that God is within us and surrounds us and most importantly is in the spaces between us. I believe that all living things—trees especially -are a manifestation of the great possibilities of God.

I believe that humans are not as central to the living world as we often behave. We are one part of an interconnected system that can thrive or fail together. That interconnected system is one way that God makes God's self known, and that interconnection may very well be God.

I believe that all people are worthy of love, especially when we don't want to or know how. I was taught this as a child and have wrestled with how to live it ever since.

I believe that questions are more meaningful than answers. Questions are how we express our wonder and awe at the world around us. Answers are often the end of a conversation, but questions continue the talking, the learning, and the wonder.

I believe that the Bible is not a book of obedience but a book of exploration, about people who wrestled with their own history and tried to make meaning out of it all. To me, the person we call Jesus is the most important figure in that exploration: the Jesus who said “Love God, yourself, and the other”; the Jesus who says to give everything up and follow these teachings.

I believe that prophetic voices still exist today and are found where prophetic voices have always existed: on the margins. People of color, indigenous people, immigrants/refugees, LGBTQ+ folk, the disabled, the poor, the imprisoned, children, and all people who live on the margins of the dominant culture and status quo have the ability to speak prophetically. I believe it is the responsibility of those of us in the dominant culture to listen and act.

I believe that white people are responsible for the creation and continuance of the systems and structures of white supremacy, and it is our responsibility to dismantle it. Our restoration is dependent on giving things up and participating in changing the caste system that has been created for us.

I believe that words—how we speak—are very important. I also believe that what we do—the actions we take—defines who we are and shows how we listen to the ever-present but mysterious voice of God.

I believe the enduring life-force of God is found in all living things regardless of sentience, and especially regardless of skin color, gender, age, sexuality, ability. God is too limitless to be limited.

I believe that we live in a culture that celebrates violence, greed, and unnecessary stratification and this is antithetical to God. I believe it is my responsibility to live against that.

I believe that all people have at least one calling in this world and it is our responsibility to live it with authenticity. This calling does not need to be grand, but life-giving, purposeful, and generous.

I believe that a religion without an aspect of the divine feminine is not yet fully realized.

I believe that faith communities are uniquely important because we can do things differently here, and yet I have witnessed that we are so often unwilling to take the risks to do so.

Life is hard enough without making it harder on each other.

I believe that it is a mark of maturity to be able to wrestle with and name what it is that you hold true, find important, and believe right now and maintain the wisdom to recognize its eventual changes.

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Selections from Confirmands' Statements

Eli Brunelle

I'm still searching for something that calls me. Maybe I'll never find that thing, and maybe it's not what God has planned for me, but I figure I'd at least try. If they are out there, I'm sure they'll find a message to send to me. Or maybe they won't! God, and this religion as a whole, is a place of many conflicting ideas, hypocrisy, lies, and misuse of text all built into a package called faith. But I think that's what draws us here to worship. Because all of those things are human. All of those things are true. Who knows if there is a God, but what draws us here is the idea that we are not alone. We have a place where people we love can build something great together. And even with or without a God in mind, I think there's something beautiful to that.

Toby Eichten

I believe that there is some sort of higher power that has made this universe to where it has come today. I believe that the world needs religion, for without it there will be no kindness and therefore there will be no hope. I believe that we have made religion to not be afraid of the unknown and have hope in our small, small lives. I believe that we humans tend to truly love something once it has been taken away from us. We don't realize that what is gold can be taken away. But religion opens our eyes to what we do have and lets us be grateful for everything that is sacred around us. I believe in the lessons and the lifestyles that were taught to us in the Bible. For without them, our lives would be miserable.

Sylvia Gjevre

I believe in nature and all things natural and all the parts of it having meaning. I believe that we are connected to each other by something that we can feel guiding us. I can't quite comprehend it or put it into words, but I know it is there and it is true. I think it is important to stand up for others, and I feel connected by the causes we stand up for here. It feels good to be in a place full of other people who are like you in some ways. It is just enough support.

Lucy Hugunin

When our confirmation Companions read their "I believe" statements to us, there was something mentioned multiple times, that was nature and being outdoors. I also believe in the things our church supports: from the Climate and Environmental Justice Committee to the Racial Justice Initiative and so many more. During Covid, I was on the Climate and Environmental Justice Committee, and that gave me an outlet to help a cause I support and also to branch out and meet new people that are a part of the church. I believe that the things we stand for bring us together, in the form of church, clubs, protests, etc. Finally, I believe that I am currently developing my beliefs around church and God as I develop as a person.

Jimmy Hulse

I believe that there is a God, or some kind of higher power, but I don't pretend to understand what God may be. I believe that humans will never fully understand whatever is running our universe, due to the limitations of our own intelligence. I think that people are too fixated on what is right and wrong and historically accurate when it comes to religion and faith, and not enough on its impacts. Some faith organizations may have negative impacts that spread hate and paranoia, but I believe institutions like Plymouth spread love.

Clara McCallister

The theme at Peace Camp a couple of years ago was superheroes. We were each asked what we could do to make the world a better place, and that defined our superpower. I felt like my superpower was a little weird. It was talking to people. The more I thought about it the more I realized how it could, in fact, be a superpower. Those of you who know me know I like to strike up a conversation with just about anyone. It might not save the world, but it is how I show my love, respect, and interest in the people around me. Plymouth is a place where I can talk to people who are not my peers, where I can make connections with people of any age and many backgrounds. There is a joke that I always like to sit with the adults. I like just sitting there and soaking up all of the stories. I might not know where these people come from, but talking is how I show my genuine curiosity to anyone. I like to know what people do when I don't see them. I like to know about their hobbies, about their pets, siblings, and what happened with their friends. I like to know what makes each person who they are. The stories people tell give me an insight into their life. I realized that it also works the other way round. I can share my stories to invite people into my life. So I try to talk to everyone. I hope I have talked enough about myself that you will invite me into your life.

Rowyn Rice

Humans have always had this natural fear of the unknown; they've also always had this fear of fear because as Shakespeare said, "When you fear a foe, fear crushes your strength; and this weakness gives strength to your opponents." So naturally as humans we have always needed some sort of cushion to save us from this fear that'll always be behind us and these questions that follow. Where am I going to go when I die? How do I know when I die I am going to be in a good place? If there was something that created everything then can they also destroy things? But I know that right now I believe that people should believe in what they want to believe in, but it should never be the reason for hate or discrimination or fear.

Cameron Roed

The three major parts of the scout law that I follow on a daily schedule are being helpful, cheerful, and trustworthy. The way that I practice being trustworthy in my daily life is by being honest in what I say. An example of how I am trustworthy is that I keep my word when I am asked to do something. The way that I practice being cheerful in my daily life is being happy even when I am faced with challenges. An example of how cheerful I am is when I have a group project but do all the work but have to be happy until it's finished. And finally, the way that I practice being helpful is that I help any that ask or look like they need help. An example of being helpful is when I see classmates that are struggling with the topic, I ask if they need me to re-explain the topic. All of these things, especially the scout oath and law, are what I believe in today. I know that my beliefs will change in many different parts of my life. This is something that I believe that everyone will do at least once in their lifetime.

Dash Treiber

Being in Plymouth taught me how important having a community to rely on if you need help, not about what to believe in. In my eyes, religion is a comfort. Comforts like religion are so, so important. Whether it's help with daily struggles or just someone to talk to, my peers help me through most every step of my life. And I think I would need a religion I believe in if I didn't have them. Having something to give comfort—if it's friendship, belief, arts—is what makes life worth living.