

There is an "I" in worship

By [Beth Merrill Neel](#)

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A few Sundays ago, as the deacons brought the offering up to the table and the congregation sang the Old 100th doxology, I found myself doing what I always do when singing that doxology: changing the words to make the God-language more inclusive. It's just a thing I do, week after week, my little stab at feminism in the midst of a tradition that is slowly, but perceptibly, moving away from patriarchy.

And then I felt like David when Nathan said to him, "You are the man." Not in the "you da man" way, but in the "you yourself do what you've been critiquing others for doing" way. It all started with the Apostles' Creed.

Our Presbyterian Rules of How To Do Things, otherwise known as the Book of Order, says that the Apostles' Creed shall be said as part of the baptism liturgy, so when my husband and I arrived at the church we serve as co-pastors, we put the creed (which had been taken out at some point) back in the liturgy. At first we introduced the creed saying the words I'd memorized in my early years of pastoring. "Let us stand and affirm our faith and the faith of our church, using the words of the Apostles' Creed."

We got some feedback on that, so we changed the intro. "Let us join in the historic tradition of the church, saying together the Apostle's Creed, which the church has said in baptism for thousands of years." Feedback on that too, but it's still in.

There are some people who really like saying the Apostles' Creed, like the way it ties us to the ancient church; some of them probably wish we'd say it, or another creed, every week. But there are people who really, really, REALLY don't like it. They don't believe some or most of the stuff in there. They don't like the Father language. The Virgin Birth seems to be a tricky part, as is the descent into Hell, as is the resurrection of the body. (For me, Virgin Birth is non-essential; descent into Hell is another way of saying Jesus died; I love the doctrine of resurrection and believe in it.)

There are some people who don't like to pass the peace, or to say "the peace of Christ be with you." There are some who don't like opening the service with the words "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." There are some who wish we didn't do Moments with Children, and likely more than a few who wish there were no sermon, or a more intellectual sermon, or a less intellectual sermon. Some don't like the prayers of the people.

You get the picture. What's a poor pastor to do?

First, I am grateful that people in our pews take theology seriously, and want to be authentic about what they say they believe. We have a broad array of theological beliefs in the congregation, and I would have it no other way, because it enriches our conversation and our life together.

Second, there is room for all of us. If I choose to sing different words to the doxology, why can't someone else stand but not say the Apostles' Creed? Why can't someone who is new to Christianity say "Good morning" and in time, may learn to say "The peace of Christ be with you"?

Third, we're keeping the tricky bits in. Sure, we could take out "This is the day the Lord has made", and the passing of the peace, and the children's time, and the sermon, and the prayers, and the creeds, and a lot of people would be happy. A lot of people would be unhappy. A lot of people would be comfortable that we don't have complex things, or blatantly faithful things, in the service, but without those things, worship would be pretty watered down and if I went to a worship service that didn't challenge me, or even make me mad or questioning just a little bit, then I might as well to Starbucks, drink a latte, and read the Sunday New York Times.

Which a lot of people do. But not those who show up Sunday after Sunday to sit in our pews, to sing, to pray, to get bothered, to be comforted, to be told they are loved, with all their questions and opinions and preferences. They are loved, and so am I.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God all creatures here below;

Praise God above, ye heavenly host;

Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost.

But about that “Ghost” part....

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