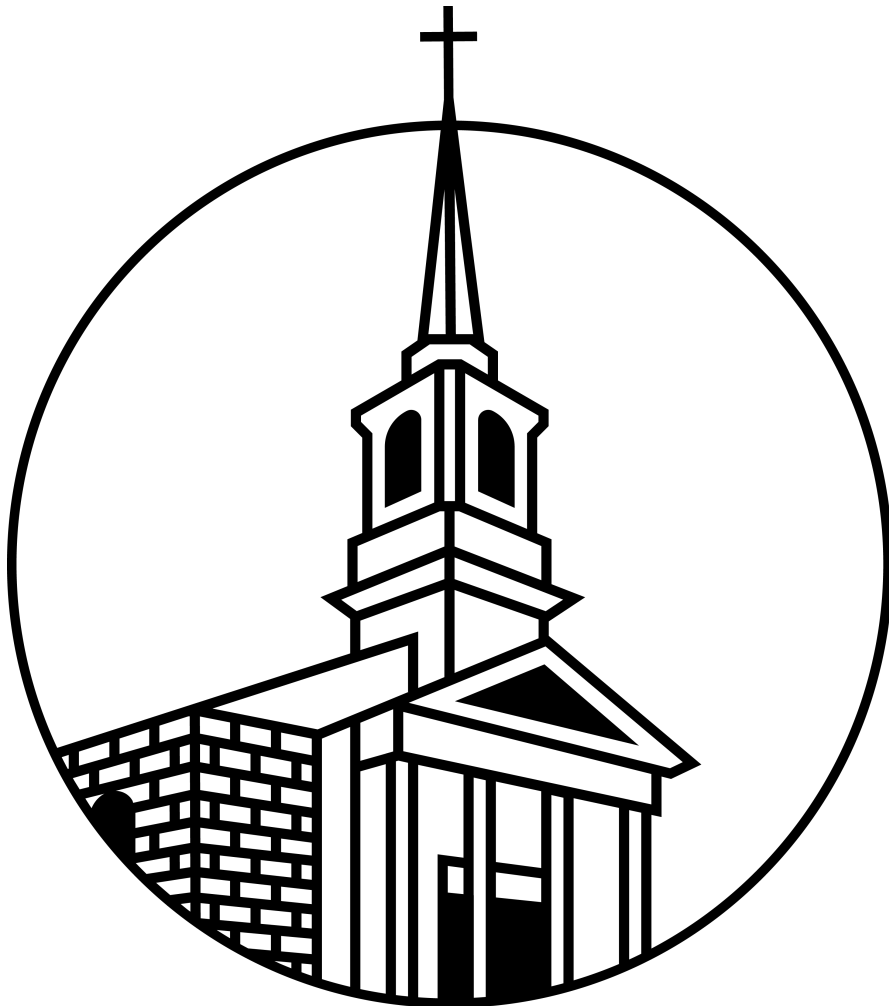


JUBILEE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Statements of Faith



These statements describe a set of clear convictions rooted in the stories of the Scriptures. They offer a starting point from which the church can proceed and to which we can return, but that always understand questioning, doubt, and dissent as integral to our community of faith.

I. God:

We believe in the God who is three in one and one in three, whose mysteries are revealed in the poor, dark flesh of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

When we say the word “God” we do not know what we mean other than by reference to the story of Jesus Christ made manifest by the power of the Holy Spirit (Col 1:15, 1 Cor 12:3). The source of our life is not an abstract deity or an image of power on a throne, but a Galilean Jew, a poor, dark-skinned worker who offers freedom to captives, forgiveness to debtors, and care to the sick while also driving the moneychangers from the Temple and calling the rich and powerful to repent. For this ministry, the Powers that rule this world crucified Jesus to assert their dominance, and yet Christ rose from the dead, ushering in New Creation, the inauguration of a world whose possibilities are not determined by sin and death (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus then ascends to show that God’s life exceeds any human frame even while working within them.

Furthermore, when we say “God” we mean the Spirit whom Jesus breathes upon us (John 20:22), the Spirit who gives new visions and new words (Acts 2:17-21), the Spirit who stirs us up in worship and gestures beyond the walls of the Church where God is always already at work (Acts 8:26-40). The Spirit moves disciples to live as if New Creation is already blooming so that we challenge the common sense of our day with a new sense of the common (Acts 2:42-47).

This is who God is: Infinite mystery, the source of all life, revealing itself in Jesus’ flesh, pouring itself out upon us in the Spirit, joining the lowly and all who take up their crosses to become lowly, drawing them into God’s own life.

II. Creation and the World:

We believe that creation is good, and while sin and death have reorganized creation into a devastated world, that goodness abides.

In the beginning, uncompelled by need or force, God’s infinite love poured itself out to make that which is not God, creation (Gen 1-2). Creation is pure gift, its purpose nothing more or less than to delight the Creator and receive God’s delight in return (Proverbs 8:30-31). The multiplicity, abundance, and fruitfulness of creation bear the image of God’s

infinite and unsearchable beauty (Rom 1:20). God created humanity to be dependent on creation's ecosystems, which provide all that everyone needs, and charged us to tend and love creation as bearers of God's image (Gen 1:26). God says that all of creation is very good and creation's goodness abides (Gen 1:31).

But creation has become a devastated world. The "world" is creation re-organized by Powers and Principalities that govern according to sin and death and constant accusation. Beginning with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, humanity has exploited and consumed our ecosystems. Where in Creation God has made enough of what everyone needs, in the World a few hoard far more than they need, subjecting their neighbors to poverty (James 5:1-6). These few have used their power to build Empires that divide creation into networks of consumption and then warred against one another over them (Gen 11). Neighbors have divided themselves from each other as they seek to please their rulers rather than stand in solidarity (1 Samuel 8), and we have become accusers of our own selves, contorting our souls to fit within the status quo. Our wills are twisted so that we fear what we might love, love what we should fear, and all too often treat each other with pettiness and cruelty (Rom 7). This whole network of devastation, from the global to the intimate and personal, is what we mean by "sin."

While the church confesses the devastation of the world, we also continue to affirm the indelible goodness of creation. There is "the dearest freshness deep down things," a fire burning beneath the ash that sin cannot snuff out. So even as we struggle against the Powers and Principalities, we continue to affirm the goodness of creation wherever we find it, whether that's in the church or not.

III. Salvation, Israel, and Church:

We believe God saves us from our devastation by the New Creation begun in the whole life of Jesus.

In our devastated world, we are isolated and alienated. We labor and others take the fruits of our work. Creation becomes property, kinship becomes contract, and we must practice self-care because there is no community to care for us. Salvation names the way that God frees us from our devastation through acts of New Creation that always take the form of solidarity and belonging.

God saved when God called Abraham and his children to live according to different patterns within the world: a different economy of food (the Kosher laws), a different habit of time and labor (the Sabbath), and a different practice of justice (caring for the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow). God saved when God freed the children of Abraham from Pharaoh's tyranny, taking them down into the waters of chaos and then

raising them to walk in newness of life on the way to a land of milk and honey. And in the story we tell, God recapitulates all these acts of salvation when God comes near in Jesus' Jewish flesh, joining us in the chaos of this world and even death itself to inaugurate New Creation in the Resurrection.

As a part of this act of salvation—which is nothing less than Jesus' own life—God poured the Spirit upon the disciples so that they might be baptized into Jesus' Body. By the power of the Spirit, whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, Jesus is among them and they are the Church, the Body of Christ making manifest God's love in the world.

As baptists, we believe that the church is the priesthood of all believers, that every member of the church has some gift to offer the Body and that the work of the Body does not fall to any one member alone (1 Cor 12). Even so, we continue to live in the world and the hierarchies that beset the world continue to operate within the church, so the church must actively work to create new patterns that reflect New Creation (Gal 5). At times, the Church itself sins and must repent. Likewise, the goodness of creation always, already persists beyond the church.

As such, the church is called to be a place that worships to remember God's work of New Creation through the people of Israel and in Jesus; that gathers to nourish one another, to tend each others' wounds, and to celebrate each others' joys; that struggles to tear down the dividing walls upholding the patterns of this world; that holds all things in common so that the poor might find liberation from their oppression and the rich from their idolatry of Mammon.

IV. Scripture:

We believe the Scriptures are the testimony of God's work in the world, and when read in the Spirit they provide pictures and patterns that guide our life together.

The Scriptures provide testimony of God's work in the world through Israel, Jesus, and the Church. When read with the help of the Spirit, they are "God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). The stories of the Scriptures are not a blue-print or a set of timeless instructions that we are supposed to apply without discernment to any given situation. They themselves tell us the Devil is an expert at proof-texting (Luke 4). Instead, the Scriptures provide pictures and patterns that serve as a lens through which we can read our world. As baptists, we wish to inscribe those same patterns in our lives and in the life of our community.

But the Bible is never a substitute for our responsibility to discern God's calling in our time. The Letter kills but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6) and the Scriptures are instructive, not

exhaustive (John 21:25), which means that the church is called to bind and loose their commands according to the Spirit's leading (Matt 16:19). Sometimes the Spirit even calls us to contest the letter of the Bible when our reading of individual verses works against the pattern of Jesus' own life (Mark 2:27).

V. Freedom:

We believe that God's Spirit is at work in creation and that our neighbors must have the freedom to respond to that work as the Spirit urges them.

Our calling as the church is to tell and live the story of Jesus in such a way that the beauty of our life together stirs up our neighbors' desires for New Creation (Matt 5:16). This is why baptists have always affirmed the freedom of each person's soul before God. We believe that the Spirit of God is at work in the world and in peoples' hearts, bringing healing and transformation, often in ways beyond our imagining (Eph 3:20). We allow the Spirit the freedom to do its work and our neighbors their freedom to tell other stories, as well. We do not use coercion or emotional manipulation to get our neighbors to become Christians. Many of our neighbors live within different stories and Jubilee embodies the story of Jesus by blessing rather than cursing and conquering them.

VI. Politics:

We believe that God calls the church to gesture toward another world in every aspect of our lives together.

The church is called to witness to New Creation within the world. As such, the church lives as an unavoidably political body, though the church's politics does not fit seamlessly into those of the state.

The term "politics" can mean: 1) Communal discernment and pursuit of what is good, 2) the machinations of the American two-party system, 3) the church's witness of dissent and liberation in the world. The church is political in the basic sense that we discern together what is good and attempt to pursue that good as a body. The Scriptures testify that the people of God are doing what is good when sharing what they have so that everyone has what they need (Acts 2:42, James 2). So as we pursue what is good, we must address material issues like wages, housing, debt, etc. If our faith does not go to work in these ways, it is a demonic parody of faith in Jesus (James 2:19).

But the church dissents from and challenges the second definition of politics. As baptists, we affirm the separation of church and state and the United States government's Johnson Amendment (which prohibits churches from intervening in election campaigns by

endorsing or financing candidates). We do not want the state to institute any religion and the church does not exist to salve the consciences of those in power (Mark 12:17).

The third sense of politics is necessary because the Powers continue to run the world according to the logic of fear, sin, and death. In the face of the world's injustice, God calls the church to side with the least of these by dissenting and agitating against sinful structures and working for the liberation of New Creation because we believe a different world is possible now. In these pursuits, the church might find itself allied with neighbors who are also working for a better world from the underside of power, and we can and should join our neighbors in these public ways.

VII. The End

We believe in the resurrection of the dead, in New Creation, that in the end heaven comes to earth.

When God raises Jesus from the dead, we glimpse the End, the goal of creation, which is its renewal and glorification not its dissolution (1 Cor 15:20). Our ultimate hope is not a disembodied eternity where souls leave behind a burning earth, but New Creation (Rev 21).

We hope for a land of milk and honey, a place where no one has reason to weep, where God soothes every pain, where scars testify that our wounds have not ultimately defeated us. We look toward a heavenly banquet in a city where the gates are always open and the streets are made of gold because we care no more for gold than asphalt. In Jesus and the Spirit, this end has come into the middle of history, not yet in fulness but in possibility, and God calls the church to live as if this new world is possible now.