

# GRINDSTONE CHURCH

## **What We Believe (The Story We Find Ourselves In)**

We believe God inspired the authors of Scripture by His Spirit to speak to all generations of believers, including us today. God calls us to immerse ourselves in this authoritative narrative communally and individually in order to faithfully live out that story as we are led by the Spirit of God. God revealed Himself to humanity broadly, and Israel specifically in order to teach us who He is, who we are, and how to live. The Bible is a collection of these revelations from God that have been recorded and passed along so that the Words of God can speak to all generations.

In the beginning God created everything that is. All things were created “very good” and existed as a declaration of God’s wisdom, goodness and love.

Existing within a mysterious relationship with himself – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- God made us his image-bearers, a unique vocation within the rest of creation. As image bearers, we humans were called to serve, care for, and cultivate the creation in all its dimensions. God’s desire was that through our efforts the creation would flourish within the context of a flawless harmony (or *Shalom*).

An enemy emerged who offered the first humans a chance to reject this God-ordained plan through an offer to “become like God”. As a result of their hasty decision the creation entered a sinful state, becoming twisted and broken. The result was that the original harmony God intended for His creation was replaced by discord at all levels of creation. Evil and darkness had become interwoven with the “very good” creation, and humans experienced a new reality where their core relationships to God, each other, themselves and the creation became characterized by alienation, strife, suffering and death.

However, in spite of humanity’s rebellion from all that was good, God did not abandon His creation to ongoing destruction and decay; rather He set his will to destroy all evil and darkness through a chain of redemptive measures.

As part of this redemptive purpose, God chose a people—Abraham and his descendants—to represent Himself in the world. God promised to bless them as a nation so that through them all nations would come to experience a restored relationship to God, each other, themselves and the creation.

In time God's chosen people became enslaved in Egypt and cried out to God because of their oppression. God heard their cry, liberated them from their oppressor, and brought them to Sinai where he gave them an identity and a mission as a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy people.

Despite their frequent rejection of this mission, God refused to give up on his people (Israel), and brought them into the Promised Land so they could be further empowered to be a light to the nations. While there were attempts to fulfill this calling by some of the people, some of the time, all too often Israel turned its back on God and struggled with mistreatment of the poor and oppressed, indifference towards the vulnerable within their midst, and idolatry to false gods.

God raised up prophets from among the people whose voices God used to call Israel to repent (turn around) from these practices. Through the prophets God's heart to see a full restoration of the creation was made explicitly known. And God's starting point for genuine repentance was made clear: Israel must begin with justice and love being extended to the poor, vulnerable and oppressed.

Eventually, through ongoing disobedience, God's people became indifferent and in turn irrelevant to the purposes to which God had called them. For a time they were sent into exile; yet a hopeful remnant held to the hope of a renewed reign of God, where peace and justice would prevail, and God's intention for His creation would be restored and fulfilled.

We believe this hope found its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (thereby mysteriously holding full divinity and full humanity within himself—God embodied). Through his life and teachings Jesus proclaimed that God was ushering in a new movement within His redemptive plan, one where God's people (and eventually all of creation) would come to live within "the Kingdom of God". In short, this "Kingdom of God" is the reign and rule of God, in such a way that His will is done *on earth as it is in heaven*. Jesus, through the process of discipleship, invited people to step into this reality now and experience a salvation (rescue) from sin previously unavailable, but now possible through him.

Jesus and his message were rejected by many as he confronted the competing "kingdoms" of the religious elite and the Roman Empire. Through his torturous suffering and eventual crucifixion, the ruling powers believed they had made an "example" of Jesus and suffocated his message.

However, the resurrection of Jesus revealed that He was the true and rightful "Lord and Saviour of the world", and his resurrection stands as the inauguration of a new order of things for all creation.

Soon after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all the believers as promised and thousands of people would become followers through the tireless efforts of the apostles. Jesus' followers began to spread his teachings "to the ends of the earth" with a purpose of seeing God's kingdom established on earth "as it is in heaven." A movement was born.

That movement spawned the formation of local "Jesus gatherings" that were rooted and grounded in Christ's life and message. They attempted to be an expression of the way of Jesus to a broken and hurting world, and sought to participate with God in the restoration of all things (a restoration that had been begun in a new way through Jesus' resurrection).

In the centuries to follow the Church has oscillated between faithfully incarnating Jesus to the world, and denying Jesus' instructions in both word and deed. As a church who understands itself to be a continuation of this movement, Grindstone's hope is to be a "Jesus gathering" that is eager to learn from the past and be faithful to the discipleship call of Christ.

God is now reconciling all who are in Jesus to Himself, each other, themselves, and the creation. This reconciliation is done through God's Holy Spirit who empowers, convicts, guides, comforts, counsels, and leads us into truth as we live and worship together and reach out with love and compassion to those in need of the salvation found in Jesus. In the end, our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and creation will be whole. All of creation will flourish as God intends. A new chapter in the story will be written, but it will be a chapter that contains no sorrow, suffering, or loss, but one full of joy, love and fulfillment. Jesus is humanity's only hope for bringing peace and reconciliation between God and his creation. Through Jesus humans are offered salvation (rescue) from sin through forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Our mission as disciples within Christ's church is fuelled by the conviction that God's ancient longing to fully restore His good creation will be fulfilled. At an unknown time in the future, Jesus—the rightful Lord and Saviour of the world—will return to judge the world, bringing an end to injustice and restoring all things to God's original intent. The earth's groaning will cease and God will dwell with us here in a restored creation. On that day there will be no more death and God will wipe away all our tears. In a final and comprehensive way, God will reclaim this world and rule in love and justice forever.