

THIS I BELIEVE

November 2019, CMCL

I was nurtured as a child in the Mennonite Church, regularly attending Church, Sunday School, Bible School and Revival Meetings. I learned a lot about what WE believe. At age 12, my cousin and I, in preparation for our baptisms, sat for 8 weeks each Sunday morning in front of our male 2 preachers and deacon, reviewing all the beliefs and documents of the church. As a Lancaster Mennonite High School student, I got A's in the Bible Doctrine class. And in later years, I studied theology, did well in seminary and then at age 56, became a Mennonite Pastor, teaching and interpreting the Bible for myself and others.

But when Susan asked me to share what I believe, I was not sure I had anything to share. What happened to my carefully nurtured understanding of faith and my studies of the Bible and the varied interpretations? My world had become complicated by friendship with Muslims who knew truth differently. My conscience had been pricked by the tragedies imposed by Christians through the Crusades, in the destruction of people and cultural art in Turkey, in the Church's inability to work hard to name its white supremacy and to dismantle racism, its inability to advocate for the rights of women, and the GLBTQ community. I had observed how belief has caused divisions and hate and wars, in communities around the world, in our own communities, and even in our churches. I had never lost touch with God, but I no longer had a set confession of beliefs.

As I continued to ponder what I might share with you today, I came to this statement of belief, which seems to inform much of the rest of my life:

I am a child of God, and always will be, even when I don't believe it.

And so is everyone else! God created us all. We are all God's children.

God is present in all living beings.

These distilled statements words carry more weight than the words contained in them. These are words that impel me to action and behaviors that are

more difficult to do but are very much in line with Jesus' teaching and my Anabaptist heritage, where life lived, **is as or more important, than** the words used to define it!

This understanding of myself and of others and of all living beings stretches me to act with gratitude, with kindness, and most difficult for me, to live with generosity of thought and sharing towards others. These beliefs affect how I understand myself and how I try to understand others, who are different or believe differently than I do, even those who deeply repel me. *(Pause)* I can still speak out against behaviors that perpetuate injustice AND I am continuing to learn **how** to do that, knowing that:

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And so is everyone else! God created us all. We are all God's children.

God is present in all living beings.

Elizabeth G. Nissley