CREDO

Augsburg University Chapel
September 4, 2026

Matthew 16: 13-19

Twenty years ago this week, I stood at this pulpit for the first time and asked the community to share what they believed in. Today, at the beginning of my final year as Augsburg's 10th president, I come back to this pulpit to say again how important I think it is that we are willing to share our diverse beliefs with each other.

In my Christian tradition, there is this wonderful moment in the Mass, when the cantor's voice declares: *Credo in unum Deum* – a bold proclamation of faith that rings out in the sanctuary to lead the congregation into its profession of the creed. For me, this is where the work of education begins…

Who do you say that I am? Our gospel for this morning invites all of us to a proclamation of our credo, our faith. And as is so often the case in the Christian scriptures, the disciples offer all of us a glimpse of the range of human responses to the work of God in our midst.

The first response to the question is to offer a summary of what other people believe – here is what others say…how often we find ourselves doing the same thing – let me show you what the research tells us about this question (read a few doctoral journal articles, try AI!) – I dare not take a personal stand. But that response is not good enough for Jesus. But who do you say that I am?

The second response is more firm – at least for Peter – who declares his belief that Jesus is the son of the living God – good answer, except that a few chapters later it is Peter who is betraying his faith when questioned by bystanders in the midst of a crisis…(see Matthew 26)

And then we have Jesus' wise words and promise to Peter – there is something remarkable here, this proclamation of faith, and on this rock I shall build my kingdom on earth…really?

Well, we could say that Jesus was naïve in entrusting his kingdom to a mortal whose faith he knew would waver – or we could embrace the wisdom that it begins here with a bold proclamation of faith and then it proceeds, through the grace of God, in myriad paths of blessing and deceit and disorder and joy – glimpses of salvation interspersed with human weakness.

Jesus is clear – you begin here with an answer to the question of what you believe – the way of discipleship is grounded in the leap of faith, the credo, and from there the adventure of life is launched – to be met with all sorts of detours and disappointments but also with all fashion of forgiveness and grace and wonder

Why is a credo important at the beginning of our academic year here in this university? Like the disciples, we too often fall back on the opinions of others, we are afraid to take stands for fear that we will be wrong or hurt or worse. And like Peter, even when we take a stand and declare our credo, we mess up and betray the faith we declare

But the wonder of a university – at least a university like ours, grounded in a faith community and willing to place faith and values at the heart of its work – is that we are able and expected to state our beliefs with conviction and then to go forward together, knowing that those diverse beliefs must be tested by experience, by relationships, by conversations, by time, by education in the broadest sense…this is the core work of our university

Our Lutheran Christian heritage confirms this relationship between faith and learning – we believe but we also know that our faith is not complete – we are fallible, we are human, we are sinful – Lord, I believe, help my unbelief – and that is why we gather here as a community – in this chapel, in this university, in this city, in the midst of God's creation – to share our faiths and to know that our work as a university is to question, to educate, to strengthen, to test, to embrace, to connect our faith with our learning

I want to know what you believe – I want to learn from your beliefs even as you learn from mine – our conversations as a community about what we believe are at the heart of our common life, they are a critical part of the educational enterprise, and they are a central aspect of a healthy democracy – this isn't about evangelism, this is about the sort of public discourse that reflects the richness of our lives together in society – and our faith is clearly part of that rich fabric of human experience and community

Stephen Carter, a Yale law professor, has written with great wisdom on the need to have conversations about our faith a central part of public discourse – for Carter, this is an important part of the "etiquette of democracy," a willingness to be persuaded that we can learn from others. Without such public conversations about what we believe, what we value, what we care about, we are left to closely-held opinions and to the sort of polarization about faith and values that characterizes life in our country right now. We won't necessarily agree – but we owe it to each other to come to what my teacher the late Martin Marty has called the "great, republican banquet table," where a seat is waiting for us, the conversation is lively, and we enjoy the company.

National Public Radio several years ago reestablished a wonderful series entitled "This I Believe", for which they invited all sorts of folks to write and ready essays about their

faith – I could preach a sermon on each of my belief statements, but here they are in summary fashion…and they haven't changed in 20 years!

- I believe in a generous and gracious God whose love for us is beyond understanding but demands of me diligent and vigilant life in the world
- I believe in the power of forgiveness and the gift of reconciliation
- I believe in democracy, the miracle of abundant life together with strangers
- I believe in each of you and the promise of your work here together – the nexus between your personal gifts and calls and the mission and vocation of Augsburg College – the wonders and grace of learning
- I believe in the blessings of the ordinary – in glimpses of salvation – they may be all we have some days, but they give us meaning and hope

I also believe that if we aren't willing to share what we believe in with each other, there is a steep price to pay for our sense of community and the work we are called to do together. The late poet, William Stafford, captures my concerns in this excerpt from his poem, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other."

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.
…..
And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider—
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give — yes or no, or maybe —
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus asks his disciples. It is the question we all must answer again and again – it is the question of faith and it is where we begin, where we are grounded, where we draw our sustenance – and what better place to ask it than here at Augsburg University, in this community of learning and faith! Credo, credo, credo. Thanks be to God. May it always be so!