

8/9/2020

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
The third day he rose from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

*universal

Scripture

Matthew 7:9-11

9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

I Believe in God the Father...

You and I are going to embark on another adventure together for the next several weeks. Just a few moments ago, we stood together and said aloud the Apostles' Creed and over the next weeks, we'll be taking a look at the Apostles' Creed, breaking it up into smaller sections to study. Maybe some of you are

familiar with creeds - perhaps you grew up in a Christian tradition that said them often. Or maybe you're not familiar with creeds much at all. I'm excited about this series because within the list of statements we said together earlier, there are the basic tenants of our Christian faith. And so, if or when someone - a friend, family member, coworker - says to you something like, "Hey, you're a Christian, right? I thought I knew what that meant, but recently I've been a little confused about what Christians believe. What do you believe?" When someone asks us a question like that, we'll have had our minds refreshed on what our core beliefs are as Christians. By being ready for questions like this, we are following the instruction from 1 Peter 3:15 that says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

And so, along those lines, I'd like to give you a challenge - right here at the beginning of this sermon at the beginning of this study through the Apostles' Creed - I would like to challenge you to memorize this creed along with the rest of your church family. Just as we know scripture memorization to be important so that God's Word is readily available in our minds for times when we are struggling or confused, having statements of faith like the Apostles' Creed is so important, too, for the same reasons. So, will you accept the challenge? I hope you do!

And if you're a person that might already have the Apostles' Creed committed to memory, I challenge you to say it out loud to yourself once a day for the duration of this study together. Whether you have it memorized already or not,

it might be helpful to write it out or even cut it out of your bulletin from today, and place it on your mirror or in your car - somewhere you'll see it everyday. Let's, together as a community, have these important, core beliefs in our minds at least once a day for the next several weeks to really allow these beliefs to take root in our hearts and minds.

Alright, so let me back up for just a moment and first establish what exactly a creed is. A creed is most simply understood as "a statement of the beliefs or aims which guide someone's actions" (dictionary definition). I think that definition is so helpful to understanding what a creed is because if you are someone who didn't grow up in a Christian environment where creeds were regularly used, then the idea of a creed might seem ancient or foreign. But to understand that a creed *is a list of beliefs* might help to demystify this unfamiliar concept. I also think that definition is helpful because the statement of beliefs known as the Apostles' Creed that we read together a few moments ago is not *only* a list of beliefs, like the definition says. No, to born-again Christians - this list of beliefs does not only touch our minds, our brains, our intellects - but it also touches our hearts, our hands, our feet. This list of beliefs becomes the driving force and the guiding light for how we live our lives. These statements in the Apostles' Creed about God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, the Church, the resurrection, and so on, are not *only* statements - they are a way of living that when we said yes to Jesus, when we are baptized into the family of God, we say yes and are baptized into this way of believing and living.

In fact, speaking of baptism, creeds actually came about because of how the early Church baptized people. If you've ever seen a baptism before, the person is always blessed in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit by either sprinkling water on their head or completely dunking or submerging the person in water. But by either way, baptism is always done in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. In one book I read about the Apostles' Creed, it says that people being baptized in the early church were... *"asked a question: "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?" They reply, "I believe!" And they [were] plunged down in the water and raised up again. They [were] asked a second question: "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was dead and buried and rose on the third day alive from the dead and ascended in the heavens and sits at the right hand of the Father and will come to judge the living and the dead?" Again they confess[ed], "I believe!" And again they are immersed in the water. Then a third question: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh?" A third time they cr[ied], "I believe!" And a third time they [were] immersed."* Isn't that cool? The words we said today were said all the way back as far as at least the 2nd century by those who were choosing to be washed by the grace of God, forgiven through the blood of Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit through baptism.

For today, let's focus on the very first part of that first question new Christians were asked, and the very first part of the Apostles' Creed that you and I affirmed today in the 21st Century. Actually, let's say that first sentence together again: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Today we'll focus on the first half of this statement: "I believe in God the Father..." and next week we'll cover the second half: "...almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

Increasingly, there is an uncomfortability and confusion with Christians calling God Father in today's society. However, even though Christians have historically used masculine language to describe God, that does not mean that God is male or not female. God is neither male nor female - God transcends gender. Humanity is made as male and female and together as humanity we reflect God's image, but that does not mean that God is reflected in our image. God is other. Christians might use language of "he, him, or himself" for God, is to help in our relationality with God - to help us be able to relate to God. Some believers might attempt to stay away from the confusion masculine language brings and choose to only say God or God's-self. And for those believers, it helps them view God without the trappings of language confusion regarding God's "gender". It also helps them to remember that God is in fact "other" from humanity - a being that is beyond our categories. For me, and for many other believers though, using language like "he and him" when speaking about God is helpful for me to be reminded of God's intimate, personal presence. Yes, God is completely other and God is Almighty but God also desires to be in relationship

with you and me. And along those lines, throughout the Bible there are descriptions of God's character toward humanity like a parent would love a child - helping us better understand our relationship with God. Let's look at a 4 of those examples. The Old Testament has some examples of Fatherly love and Motherly love to describe God.

In Hosea 11:1 God says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."

And in Isaiah 63:16, talking to God, scripture says, "But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us you, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name."

Then, in Isaiah 42:14 God says to Israel, "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant."

And finally, Isaiah 66:12-14 states: "For this is what the Lord says: "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."

The parent-child relationship is a uniquely nurturing and protecting relationship and is used many times in the Bible to describe God's relationship to us. When we turn from the Old Testament examples to the New Testament Jesus reveals to us the particular language of Father and Son when he describes

his personal relationship to God. You and I are familiar with this, of course. We say it every week - the prayer Jesus taught us to pray begins with "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." And with this special title for God - Father - Jesus helps his followers understand God's love and discipline in a very familiar and real way - most famously in Jesus' parable from Luke 15. The parable we know as "The Prodigal Son" describes a son who took his share of the inheritance early, breaking his relationship with his father. The son blew all the money, and after hitting rock bottom, decides to finally return to his father, begging to simply be one of his father's servants. But when the father sees his son walking home, the father runs out to meet his son, embraces him, and won't even let him get out his request to be a servant before he brings him back into right relationship with himself and the family. The story shows God's extravagant father-like love in a way that still gives me chills when I really come to understand the meaning of that parable. Because of Jesus' relationship with God the Father, we are welcomed into that Father-child relationship with Christ when we come to understand the forgiveness God offers us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. And thanks be to God for that!

However, there are still plenty of believers who have a hard time confessing God as Father or even some folks who might actually refrain from becoming a Christian *because* they cannot understand God as their Heavenly Father. Not always, but in a lot of those cases, these precious people have had a damaging relationship with their earthly father, father figure in their life, or maybe

simply a man or men in general. Abuse or neglect from men in our lives, and especially men who are entrusted to care for us, can unfortunately negatively affect our understanding of God to the point where some want nothing to do with God the Father. Maybe you have some friends or family members who feel this way - or maybe even you do sometimes or all the time. For those who feel this way about language of "Father" toward God, it's sometimes helpful to be reminded and grateful that we can *also* understand God as Son and Holy Spirit, and until those parts of their hearts are healed toward God, it's ok to understand God as Son and Spirit. God's patient and pursuing love can heal those wounds in time.

The reason I know of God's healing power in regards to Father language is because of my own story. I never knew my biological father. My life was conceived out of wedlock and my biological father never wanted anything to do with knowing me. My mom decided to keep me and care for me. She raised me as a single mother and we lived with my grandparents throughout my childhood. Thanks be to God, I had a lot of Father-figures in my life: my grandpap, my mom's four brothers, and men at church, including my pastor. My mom had me baptized as a baby and raised me in the church and so I was blessed to hear things like The Lord's Prayer starting with "Our Father..." before I could even speak the words for myself. I always knew God as my Father and through his loving, protecting, fatherly love, I - for some miraculous reason - hardly ever thought there was anything different about my childhood from all the other kids.

Without even knowing at the time in my childhood that these words were in the Bible, Psalm 68 describes my experience of Father God in verse 16: *“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.”* I truly knew God as my father, even if I never knew or still have never known my biological father, and knowing God as Father healed things in my life I didn't even know were broken. Thanks be to God.

God is in the business of redeeming not only *parts* of our story though, His desire is to redeem us. Galatians 4 says, *“...when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”* God our Perfect Father sent God the Son to pay the price for our Sins. Sin is what breaks our relationship with God, but through Jesus, our relationship with God is restored - we are adopted - we are God's children - we are His heirs - we can take hold of the glorious inheritance of everlasting life. When we recognize God's gift of Jesus who took the consequence of our sins upon himself, we are freed up to live as a child of God our Father - no longer are we slaves, but we are children of God.

[Listen to song “No Longer Slaves”]

One book I read recently said that...Coming to believe in in God is like tasting something new for the first time.

“...Christian belief is...like tasting a dish that you have never tried. You have seen other people enjoying it; you have read the reviews; the chef swears you’ll like it. There are good grounds for trusting, but you will never know for sure until you try it. “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” sings the psalmist (Ps 34:8). The first act is an act of trust that gives rise to ever-increasing certainty, which in turn nourishes a deeper and a more knowledgeable trust.”

Every day of our lives we have the opportunity to reaffirm our beliefs through our thoughts, our words, and our actions - to believe God’s Holy Word that is reflected for us in the Apostles’ Creed and to allow our lives to be changed and transformed by the grace, sacrifice and power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.