

We Believe Part 4

We are continuing our study of the essential doctrines of the church, examining the confession of our faith known as the Apostle's Creed. This morning we are going to lay some ground work for the next section of the creed.

You will recall last Sunday at the close I asked us to consider all that we've said about the first part of the creed. **We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.** Consider his eternal character and nature, his divine attributes, his omnipotent power and might. Consider that this eternal, everlasting God is beyond us and above us in every conceivable fashion. Then consider that the eternal God desires to make himself known to us. He wants to reveal himself to us and be in relationship with us. How could he accomplish this? The God whom the Psalmist said created the starry host by the breath of his mouth (Psalm 33), how could he reveal himself in all his complexity and power to us in a way that we could understand or in a way to which we could relate? How could he show himself to us in a way that wouldn't terrify us?

Let's ask this question first: How does God communicate with us? Let's make it simpler. How do we communicate? W. Mark Lanier discusses God and communication in his book *Christianity On Trial*. He explains a basic model of communication like this: "One person, the *sender* has a message he or she wishes to convey to another, the *receiver*. The sender determines how to put the *message* into words, commonly called a process of *encoding*. [We decide whether to use words or symbols, formal or informal words, english or chinese, etc.] The encoded message is then sent to a recipient through a *medium*. [The medium is the method used to deliver the message. For instance, oral, written, electronic, etc.] The recipient receives the message through the medium and decides what it means by *decoding* it. The recipient offers *feedback*, acknowledging the received message..."Mark Lanier. Lanier notes that scholars look at all aspects of communication, including things that interfere with the transmission or reception of the message.

We essentially communicate by sending messages to one another, either by speaking to one another in a language we both understand, or writing in a language we both read and understand. If we don't speak the same language or read the same language, obviously it makes communication more difficult. To add complexity to the equation, there are aspects of body language and gestures and other non-verbal types of communication that effect what is being

communicated (both in what is sent and what is received or understood). In oral communication the tone, volume, facial expression, subtle nuances – all of that goes into the process of communicating with another person. All of that would be considered part of the encoding process. We think about how it will be understood by the hearer. (It's why I don't engage in debates with people on facebook or by email. I can't see your facial expression and you can't see mine. You can't tell by my tone when I'm being serious or sarcastic.) We consider culture, context, maturity, intelligence, comprehension of the hearer. We consider the hearer's ability to decode the message we are sending. All of those things may interfere with their ability to properly decode the message. Add to it actual electronic interference if it is a message being delivered by a cell phone, or physical interference if you are speaking to someone in a crowded restaurant. All of those situations can affect our ability to hear, to decode the message, to understand what the sender is trying to communicate.

I stood in a subway station in London once, asking directions to the British Museum. The police officer kept speaking to me, I was certain it was in English, but I could not understand anything he was saying. He was encoding the message correctly and delivering the message appropriately, kindly, but I could not, for the life of me, decode the message. My receptors were only able to decode "Okie" and the Bobby was speaking the Queen's English.

I could speak English to a non-English speaker. I could speak slowly, loudly, forcefully, but if they can't decode the language, there is no understanding. I think you've got the point as to the basics of communication. Now our original question was, **How does God communicate with us? What language does God speak?** I heard Mark Rutland once say "God speaks God". In the beginning, when the Father Almighty made heaven and earth and created man and woman in his image, he spoke to them and communicated and fellowshiped with them in the garden he created for them to inhabit and enjoy. But after Adam and Eve sinned, it was like our ability to understand, to decode his message to us got all messed up. Our receptors were marred and broken and the communication gap grew wider and wider through our disobedience. We moved farther and farther away. We stopped even trying to speak the language of God and spoke the language of sin and rebellion and selfishness instead. By the time Noah came along, the bible says **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain."** Genesis 6:5-6. God

was grieved over our sinful condition and our refusal to listen to him. We weren't exactly on speaking terms. We stopped talking to God, but the good news – [news](#): God didn't stop talking to us!

Knowing that we used both oral and written mediums to communicate, God continued to speak to us, to communicate with us. We read it throughout the Old Testament, **“Thus saith the Lord.”** Over and over God spoke to us through the prophets and the patriarchs. He communicated a verbal message to those he chose to speak to and through. He also communicated by the written word. He spoke to Moses in the wilderness and called him to come up onto Mount Sinai and there God wrote on tablets of stone the Ten Commandments. The bible says God gave the law to Moses on two tablets of stone, **“...inscribed by the finger of God.”** **Exodus 31:18** By oral and written mediums, God sends a message to us, hoping we will listen and receive and respond to that message.

God keeps talking and his people the Jews start listening. At least for a while. But God didn't want to just talk to the Jews, he wanted to talk to everyone. He wanted all of creation to hear his voice and his message, to be able to understand, so this is what he did. The bible says, **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** **Hebrews 1:1-3**

God decided to communicate with us in a way that we couldn't misunderstand. Instead of just speaking to us through the prophets with “thus saith the Lord” or communicating to us through the written word like the ten commandments, he decided to communicate in the clearest way possible. Instead of telling us about himself, or showing his glory in the heavens; instead of telling us how to live holy lives that please him, he decides to come be with us, to show us what he is like, to reveal himself to us and communicate with us – up close and personal!

How can God reveal himself to us? Remember, by his breath he creates the starry hosts. His glory would overwhelm us. So he lays aside his glory so we won't be blinded by it and he becomes one of us, without sin (Philippians 2). Now we can see him and hear him and his word to us in the one we know as God's Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel of John says it like this: **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was**

with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1,14. The “Word” here is referring to Jesus Christ. How amazing that God wants to communicate with us and the very means he uses is referred to as the Word. Everything God is and everything God wanted to communicate to us he wrapped up in Jesus Christ, God in flesh. Love personified. Wisdom personified. Grace personified. Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. He isn’t just telling us about God. He is showing us God in the flesh. He is the exact representation of his being Hebrews says. Jesus said it this way – **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” John 14:9**

This is God encoding his message to us in a medium that we can’t miss. We understand because he is one of us, yet without sin. And he isn’t just communicating his commandments to us or some instructions on how to be better people, he has come in the flesh so we could see love in action. He has come to save us from our sins by dying on the cross for our sins. This isn’t seeing God in the sunset or the beauty of a rainbow or in the stars of the heavens, this is seeing God dying in agony on a Roman cross so we can be saved and have eternal life and fellowship with him. He isn’t just pointing the way. He has come to show us the way. “Believe and repent. Take up your cross and follow me.”

Remember the Bobby in London that I couldn’t understand. He kept explaining to me and I just couldn’t follow what he was saying. You know what I needed? I needed him to walk out of the train station and around the corner and show me the way. I needed him to take my place as a lost tourist and show me the way. Jesus has come to show us the way. In fact, he said, **“I am the way and the truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.” John 14:6-7**

Our broken and messed up ability to hear and understand God gets fixed when we meet Jesus and surrender our life to him. He comes to live in us and by his grace we can know the Father and communicate with Him.

He is speaking to us, plainly and clearly in Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. You may remember that last Sunday I said because God is eternal that means he is inescapable. Sooner or later we have to deal with God. You can't ignore him forever. And in Jesus Christ God is clearly, plainly communicating with you. God so loved the world that he sent his Word, his Son to us, his message in the flesh. John's gospel says, **"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12"**

He sent his Word to you. What will you choose to do? Keep acting like you don't hear him? Ignore his message? You know He is talking to you. He's calling you. Some of you he has been shouting to you, others quietly knocking, patiently waiting. It's time to stop ignoring him and respond.

Remember our communication model? The recipient of the message offers feedback – a verbal response, a nod, acknowledgment of message received. The appropriate response to God's message in Jesus Christ is believe, repent, confess, surrender, trust, obey. "Well, I'm just waiting for the right time. I'll respond to God later." The truth is, not responding to God's message is responding. It is giving him feedback. It's saying "I don't need you God. I don't want your salvation. I'll go it alone." Is that the feedback, the response you intended to send?

John said some rejected him. His own did not receive him, but all who received him, all who believed upon him, that he was God in the flesh, that he died on the cross bearing the penalty for our sins, was buried and rose again, to all who believe and call upon him to save them, he will make them his own. He will call us his children, the children of God.

God is calling and it's time to respond. It's time to believe. The apostle John had much to say about God's message to us in Christ. He was an eyewitness to it all. Towards the end of his gospel he writes, **"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:30-31.**

The Apostle's Creed declares, **"We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord."**

God is speaking. He spoke through prophets and through his word, but now he is speaking through Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord. John says, Believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God. Believe and have life in his name. There is life for you if you will place your faith in Christ and believe in his name! Trust and believe. Repent and believe. Surrender to him and believe in his name.

God has spoken to us through his Son our Savior and Lord. If we believe and follow after him, he declares that we are part of his church, the body of Christ and guess what? He is still speaking and as amazing as it sounds, he chooses to speak through us, his church, his body. We have a responsibility to live so that others can see Christ in us, the hope of glory! We are to live our lives so we communicate the message of hope and life and salvation in Christ!

We are going to receive members into our church today. We welcome these folks who have made this decision to officially join us. As I call your name, if you would come to the front and stand facing the congregation. We have folks that attend both services so I'm going to read all the names but come as your name is called.

This is your church. All of its resources are yours. You are part of the body of Christ and you have a role to play. You make it better, healthier, by being a part and contributing your talent and gifts and resources. You are made better and richer by connecting to his body the church.

For almost twenty-five years I have been reading this statement to new members, taken from Jerry Cook's book, *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness* and slightly adapted.

"We want you to know that we are committed to you. You'll never knowingly suffer at our hands. We will never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. We will always in every circumstance seek to help you and support you, to teach you, encourage you and build you up. If you are down and we can lift you up, we'll do that. Anything we have that you need, we will share with you and if need be, we will give it to you. No matter what we find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, our commitment to you will never change. And there's nothing you can do about it. You don't have to respond. We love you, and that's what it means."

Our prayer is that as part of this church you will continue to grow in understanding of God's plan and purpose for you and your life. You will continue to walk in ways that are pleasing to God and you will be a light to those around you and a message of God's grace to all who know you. Let's pray.