

We Believe Part 1

We begin a series of messages today discussing the core beliefs of the Christian faith. Last Sunday I told you it matters what you believe because what you believe affects how you live. What we believe about God, about life and death, about the bible, all of that affects the choices we make and how we live our lives. Interesting isn't it, that as Christians we are called "Believers". "Are you a believer?" "Yes." "Well, what is it you believe?" That's the question we are going to begin to answer. That was the question posed almost 2,000 years ago and the answers given then are still true and certain today.

We are going to use as the basis for our study the ancient creed referred to as the Apostle's Creed. Some of you may have been raised in a church where the creed was quoted each Sunday but for most of us it is probably unfamiliar. Let's talk about creeds for a moment. What is a creed? The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo* which means "I believe." **Webster defines creed as "a brief statement of religious belief; a confession of faith." The creed is essentially a summary of the core beliefs of the Christian faith.**

The two main creeds used in the church are the **Apostle's Creed** and the **Nicene Creed** although there are others. Who composed them and why? We don't know who composed the Apostle's creed, we just know it wasn't the apostles. However, the Apostle's Creed was based directly upon the teaching of the apostles. It is the simplest of the creeds and in some form was perhaps the earliest. The Nicene Creed was written at the first Ecumenical Council (a gathering of bishops and leaders of the church) held in Nicea in what is now Turkey in 325 A.D.

Why were they written? Okay, here's what happened. The apostle's began to preach the gospel, carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations. As they did people were saved but remember there was no New Testament, no bible. They heard the good news, believed and were saved, but they needed some kind of clear, solid statement of what it is they believed as new followers of Christ. **The creed provided a concise, clear statement of faith and belief for new converts.** It was and is the core message of the gospel. Believing this is what Christians believe.

I know every so often someone writes a book that gets people all worked up about the "other gospels" that were floating around calling into question the validity of the faith. "What about the other Christian faith that was competing for acceptance?" You mean the heresies? The false teaching? That stuff was rejected then and it is still rejected today. It didn't match up with

the teaching of the apostles! As early as 107 A.D Ignatius drafted a creedal statement used to refute one of the gnostic sects that denied that Jesus was truly God in flesh. Ignatius is one of what were called the Apostolic Fathers. They were the earliest Christian writers outside of the New Testament writers. Ignatius wrote, **“Be deaf, therefore, whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who is of the stock of David, who is of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of beings of heaven, of earth and the underworld, who was truly raised from the dead.” ... Ignatius**

About fifty years later another creed was formulated that stated, **“I believe in the Father, the Ruler of the Universe, and in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, In the Holy Church, and in the Forgiveness of Sins.”** So by 150 AD we can see the Apostle’s Creed taking shape and we can see the consistency of the doctrine. This is what the apostles taught. This is what the gospel writers taught. This is what the next generation of Christian writers, the Apostolic Fathers taught. This was considered as authoritative truth and doctrine. This is what Christians believe.

The creeds clarified the essential doctrines of the faith. Over the next three hundred years or so a variety of false teachings and heresies arose to threaten the faith. For instance, a fellow named Arius began to teach that Jesus Christ had been created by God, that there was “a time when he was not.” Why would that matter? If that is true, if Jesus is not God but was created by God, then the doctrine of the Trinity is not true. If that is true, if Jesus is not God but was created by God, then God did not become incarnate and someone other than God became our Redeemer. God has not saved us. Three hundred bishops from the farthest reaches of Christianity gathered in 325 AD to deal with this heresy and the Nicene Creed was written to clarify the doctrine of the faith. That part of the Nicene creed states: **“We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ , the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and our salvation He came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit. He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.”**

Later the nature of Jesus was called into question – how was he God and man? Did he have a human nature or a divine nature? Another council was held around 451 in Chalcedon to

clarify that he had two natures, fully human and fully divine, (what theologians call the hypostatic union). One scholar said “[The creeds] defined the perimeters of our thinking about the faith in general (the Apostle’s Creed), the Trinity (the Nicene Creed), and Christology (Chalcedon Creed) in particular.” ...Robert Webber. These creeds served as the boundary stones for the Christian faith.

The creeds summarized the faith, clarified the faith and protected the faith from error. Once again, the creeds served as boundary stones for the faith. There was no need for a survey to find the boundary line each time a question arose. **The creeds answered the question, “What has the church said?”** The creeds assisted in the passing of the truth and the tradition of the church to each successive generation.

The word tradition comes from a word that means to deliver, to hand over, to pass on to someone. Paul wrote to one church, **“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.” 1 Corinthians 11:2.** To another, **“So then brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.” 2 Thessalonians 2:15.** We quote every time we receive communion, **“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you...” 1 Corinthians 11:23.** Paul was referring to the body of truth, the teaching of the church that he was passing on to the next generation. These creeds, these creedal statements are one of the ways we make sure that the truth we hand over or pass on to the next generation is in fact the truth that has been received, the tradition of our faith. Vincent of Lerins wrote in 450 A.D., **“All possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” ..Vincent of Lerins, A.D.450.**

These are the truths, the tradition that has been believed everywhere, always, since the beginning, by all. All expressions of the Christian faith, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, agree upon and embrace these truths of the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed. After 1500 years of debate, controversy, scrutiny, attacks by heretics, questions, interpretation and reinterpretation, the truth is, the Canon of Scripture and the truth and integrity and reliability of the Creeds remain intact. This is what has been believed everywhere, always, by all.

The Apostle’s Creed

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;**

**Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost:
The holy catholic church;
The communion of Saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body;
And the life everlasting. Amen.**

I used this version of the Creed. Some have modernized it a bit, losing the King James English, changing Holy Ghost to Holy Spirit (they mean the same thing). Some have changed the word catholic to universal, which is essentially what it means or have dropped the word completely so as not to distress us Protestants. The word in the creed is not referring to the Roman Catholic church. Remember it was taking shape as early as the 2nd century, before the Catholic church as we know it came into existence.

Though the creed is worded “I believe” I called this series We Believe because I want us to see the unity and the continuity of our faith. We believe. Of course, each of us must believe as individuals as well. It must be “I believe” as well as “we believe,” but this is the tradition handed to us. This is what we as Christians, as “believers” believe. Remember, what we believe affects how we live and the choices we make. I know I’ve taken a long time to build to this, but I want you to have confidence in the tradition that is our faith. I want you to have confidence to believe, that this isn’t something that has just been around for the last hundred years or so or even since the Reformation. This is the truth that was taught, delivered, believed from the beginning. WE Believe. We join with the Christians, the saints of all ages in agreement with the essentials of our faith. These are the boundary stones for us and we can’t change them. These are the non-negotiables.

I read of an incident that happened years ago on a late night talk show. Michael Ramsey was the guest and at that time he was the Archbishop of Canterbury . As he was seated the previous guest said, “You know what I don’t like about your religion? I don’t like your exclusiveness. You say Christ is the only way to God.” The archbishop said, “Well, really, I never said that. Jesus was the one who made that claim. As a Christian I work with the documents of the faith handed down in the church. I’m not really free to disagree or reinterpret Jesus. I am committed as his follower to teach what he has taught.” (Quoted from Robert Webber). This is what we believe because this is what the bible teaches. This is the faith that has been passed down to us. This is what has been taught and believed everywhere, always, by all. We aren’t free to tamper with it, to adjust it, to alter or reinterpret it. As followers of Jesus Christ, as believers, regardless of the price or the cost, we are committed to teaching what he has taught.

We believe in God the Father Almighty. What a relief. What good news. The God I believe in is the Father Almighty! As Christians, as Believers, we believe in God, not simply giving intellectual assent to, but we believe upon, we believe into, we trust in, we have put our confidence in God the Father, Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. We believe in the God who creates, the God who rules and reigns, the God who loves as a Father, who is Almighty and all powerful, the God who can do anything and all things. The God who is transcendent, who is above and beyond yet who became incarnate in flesh to be among us, to make himself known to us, to redeem us from sin and to restore us to a right relationship with God.

We believe in God the Father Almighty. He is not one God among many, He is The Almighty God. There is no other God! He is omnipotent, that means he is all powerful; He is omniscient, that means he knows everything; he is omni-present, that means he is always and everywhere present. **A thousand years ago Anselm of Canterbury, arguing for the existence of God spoke of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived... whatever it is better to be than not to be.”...St. Anselm** That’s what God is! He is all good, all holy, all just, all merciful, complete in himself in every sense. He is God all by himself. He does not need anything and yet he desires that we be in relationship and in fellowship with him to such an extent that he sent his only begotten Son to suffer and die so we could be reconciled to God, so we could know him as Father.

We believe in God the Father Almighty. Although he reveals himself to us, through Christ, as Father, don't get confused. He is not simply some super-sized earthly father, sometimes mad at us, sometimes winking at our sins. He declares **“For I am God and not man, the Holy One among you.” Hosea 11:9.** He is holy and righteous in all his ways.

Holy and righteous and just and all powerful. I'm thankful the creed places Father before the word Almighty. Think about it: If God is simply Almighty and not Father, it doesn't bode well for any of us. He is Almighty in justice and in judgment, in wrath against sin and rebellion. He is all powerful and all seeing and clothed in blinding glory, and it is too much. We are undone. But he is God the Father, Almighty and through our trust and faith in Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, the Almighty becomes our loving and merciful Heavenly Father. His unlimited power and resources are not against us but for us.

We believe in God the Father Almighty. He is not like the “force” in Star Wars, some benevolent life energy warring against an equal and opposing malevolent darkness. He is not some impersonal force or energy, He is God the Father Almighty. There is no equal force that can oppose his will. Satan is no match for the Father Almighty. God spoke and by his mighty power the world came into existence. “Let there be” was all that was required and all things came to be and one day, all that will be required is a word spoken by him and the forces of evil and Satan himself will be bound and cast into hell. We believe in God the Father Almighty and there is no god like our God. The prophet declared, **“To whom, then, will you compare God?...He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth...he stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in.” Isaiah 40:18, 22.**

This is the God we believe in. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian wrote, **“Do you think it was a great thing for God to create the world out of nothing? I will tell you a greater thing: he makes saints out of sinners.” ...Soren Kierkegaard**

This Almighty God, all powerful and all just makes saints out of sinners! The Psalmist wrote, **“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard; that you, O God are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving.” Psalm 62:11-12.** Strong and loving, Almighty and Father, just and merciful.

He makes saints out of sinners. That's what the Father Almighty does. Because of that we no longer have to fear judgement and wrath, for through Christ our sins have been forgiven. The prophet declared, **“The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your**

enemy....The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” Zephaniah 3:15-17. We believe in God the Father Almighty and he is mighty to save!

Whatever you are facing, be encouraged, We believe in and trust in God the Father Almighty! All things are possible. Nothing is too difficult for him. The bible declares, **“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” Numbers 23:19.**

We believe in xGod the Father Almighty. He is completely worthy of our trust and confidence. We can believe in him and upon him because he cannot and will not fail. He is the God who is faithful in all of his ways, the God who said he watches over his word to see that it is fulfilled (Jeremiah 1:12). Rest in Him today. Trust in Him today. Say it with me with thankful hearts: **We believe in God the Father Almighty.** All things are possible. We believe in God the Father Almighty. We have nothing to fear. We believe in God the Father Almighty. He is mighty to save!