THE APOSTLES' CREED

INTRODUCTION

"I believe," the man cried, "help me in my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). What does it mean for us to say, "I believe"? We recognize that our belief is always partial, never perfect, never complete. We also recognize that belief is a necessary part of being human. We cannot exist as human beings without believing in something. In all truth, we cannot exist without believing in many things.

There are somethings we believe, but which are largely inconsequential. For example, I believe I will get a soda out of a vending machine after I put my money in and make my selection. But there are other beliefs upon which I stake my life. Believing in such things can be risky, because beliefs have consequences. We are concerned therefore to know that the beliefs upon which we stake our lives are rooted in the truth, that they have substance and validity.

Belief, or faith, has two components: the head and the heart. There is a knowledge component. Faith always seeks understanding and therefore demands a certain level of content. But we recognize that faith is ultimately about trust and therefore a matter of the heart. It is one thing to know (or to believe we know) and another to believe.

The creeds represent church doctrine, the basic teachings which the church considers to be essential to the faith. Typically, when we speak of doctrine we refer not to the beliefs of a specific church, but to those beliefs which are held, and have always been held, by the Christian church in general. The creeds do not attempt to narrowly define these truths, but rather to outline the boundaries of right belief.

When we say a creed, we are affirming our belief in the faith. While we recognize that our own beliefs might be idiosyncratic or to some degree peculiar to us as individuals, we also know that the Christian faith does not belong to us alone. It is bigger than any one person.

The creeds often arose out of controversy. People felt a need to define right belief and to prevent the church from going down a false path. But the creeds are also human creations. Sometimes their language is not as clear or as helpful as we might wish. Also, as we will see in this study, it is sometimes possible to say something that is absolutely true, but which can still create a false idea or impression. To be properly understood, the creeds need to find their context in the life of the church and the life of the believer.

To what degree can we say a creed, even when we doubt and even though we don't fully understand? That is one of the issues we will explore in this study. But if we claim the name of "Christian", don't we need to affirm the beliefs of the Christian church? Don't we need to recognize that the faith is bigger than my understanding and my doubt? Perhaps too, one of the purposes of saying a creed is to challenge us to grow in our understanding and in our belief.

As we study the Apostles' Creed, it is my hope that we will learn to make it our own. May we grow in our knowledge and trust of God as we study what it means to believe in the Christian faith.

God Bless, Pastor John

LESSON ONE

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

GENESIS 1: 1-5 & HEBREWS 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION

The Apostles' Creed begins with a first-person singular expression of faith. That means we need to explore what it means to believe and specifically, what it means for me to believe. Hebrews will help us to find out what it means to be a believer. The creed goes on to describe the first person of the trinity, the Father, and it does so by describing His role in the creation. While everything that is said here of the Father is true, it could lead to misunderstanding. What do we mean when we affirm the Father as creator?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) In Genesis what moved over the surface of the deep?

2) How did God create the light?

3) How is faith defined in the Hebrews?

4) How does Hebrews say that the universe was formed?

5) What kind of faith is required in order to please God?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) In Genesis would you say that the Father created the heavens and the earth?

2) What role did the Holy Spirit and the Word play in the creation of the world?

3) Do you agree with the definition of faith found in Hebrews 11:1?

4) What is the connection between hope and faith?

5) Why is it necessary to believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him?

6) Why does such a faith please God?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) When someone says that they believe in God, what do you think they would mean by that statement alone?

2) What words would you use to describe God the Father? Could you describe the Father apart from the Son?

3) If you had to write your own definition of what it means to believe or have faith, what would you write? Give it a try.

4) Do you think you have to have faith in things you can see too?

5) Do you think that God rewards your faith? Why is that important to you?

Praying through Hebrews 11:1

Loving Father, I can be so entrenched in my own thinking that sometimes I doubt Your Word and question Your promises, often wishing I had some concrete 'proof' of Your love for me – and yet Your Word gives me all the affirmation of this absolute reality I need – for Your Word and Promises are sure and Your faithfulness stretches beyond the limits of time and space. Thank You for the gift of faith, and I pray that day by day my loving trust in You and the reality of Your Word will become increasingly established within my heart – for I long to please You in all I say and do. It is Jesus' name I pray,

AMEN.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

(Hebrews 11:1)

Source: https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Hebrews/11

LESSON TWO

AND IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON OUR LORD

JOHN 1:1-5 & JOHN 3:16-18

INTRODUCTION

Without emphasizing the unity of God in the trinity, the creed goes on to describe the second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ. Jesus is identified by His title as messiah and then is described by His relationship with the Father. He is described as His only Son (and in our Bible passage as His only begotten son). What is unique about Jesus relationship with the Father? How is it possible for Jesus who is fully man to be fully God? Let's look at what the Bible has to say about Jesus the Son.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) In the beginning was what?

2) What came in to being through the word?

3) Was anything made without the word?

4) God so loved the world that He gave what?

5) What does belief in the Son give result in?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) How is the word described in relation to God in John 1?

2) The Word is described as Creator. How does that fit in with the description of God as creator in Genesis 1?

3) In John 3, God is described as giving His Son. What does that tell us about the nature of God?

4) What does the phrase one and only (or only begotten) mean?

5) What kind of belief in Jesus results in eternal life?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) How important is it to you to truly understand the nature of the trinity?

2) Do the words Father and Son denote any difference in power and authority to you?

3) What do the words "was God" mean to you?

4) Does it help you to think of Jesus as the one and only Son?

5) Why do you think that Jesus' death is described through the lens of the Father (it is described as God giving his Son)? What does that tell us about the relationship between Father and Son?

PRAYER

"Dear Heavenly Father, I'm sorry for the wrong things I've done. Please forgive me. I believe your Son died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead, and because of this I will enter into heaven when I die. Jesus, come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior. I willingly give you my life. Now, Father, help me do your will. Thank you again for saving me! In Jesus name I pray. Amen."

LESSON THREE

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

PHILIPPIANS 2: 5-11 & ROMANS 10: 5-13

INTRODUCTION

One of the things the church asserts is that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. In the ancient world, there were people who struggled with both those views. There were those who believed that Jesus was divine, but not human, and there were also people who believed that Jesus was human, but not divine. The church saw both those extremes as unacceptable; untrue to what they knew of our Savior. The Apostle's Creed insists that Jesus is our Lord and that He was fully human.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) According to Philippians what did Jesus make Himself into?

2) How was Jesus' obedience to God expressed?

3) What should be our response to Jesus' humility?

4) What does Romans say we should confess with our mouth?

5) Who will be saved?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) In Philippians, what does it mean that Jesus emptied Himself?

2) What does it mean that Jesus was found in the appearance of a man?

3) Why did God exalt Jesus?

4) In Romans, what does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord?

5) What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord and be saved if Jesus is the Lord?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) If Jesus humbled Himself, what does that tell us that we should do?

2) What does it mean to you that Jesus became one of us?

3) According to Romans, is our salvation based on what we do?

4) How much content does there need to be in the phrase, "Jesus is Lord" for it to be true?

5) When does faith become effective?

A Prayer for Humility (Based on Philippians 2:1-13)

Merciful God,
give us the same attitude as Jesus,
who emptied himself
and was obedient to you
all the way to his death on the cross.
Make us eager to put others before ourselves,
and their needs before our own.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

— *posted on the Lutheran Church of Australia's* LCA Worship Planning Page.

LESSON FOUR

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN 20:19-23 & 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God in the lives of believers. Before He died on the cross, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be present in the lives of His disciples in a new and abiding way. He promised that when the Holy Spirit came, His followers would receive power. And they did. Power to live with authority and courage. Power to boldly witness to the salvation available in Jesus Christ. Power to change the world. God's presence blessed the church and sanctified believers' lives. The Holy Spirit continues to bless His disciples today.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) According to John, on what day of the week did Jesus appear to the disciples?

2) How did Jesus give the Spirit to the disciples?

3) According to 1 Corinthians, what kind of witness does the Holy Spirit make possible?

4) Who gives the different gifts to the church?

5) Why are we given different gifts?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) How do you reconcile the story of the giving of the Spirit in John with the more familiar story of the giving of the Spirit in Acts at Pentecost?

2) What is significant about Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into His disciples?

3) What do you make of Jesus' words on forgiveness?

4) In what way does the Holy Spirit make true confession possible?

5) The Holy Spirit gives various gifts to believers for the good of the church. What does that tell us?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) How did you become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

2) Is there anyone from whom you are withholding forgiveness? Why?

3) What spiritual gifts have you been given?

4) Do you wish you had other gifts?

5) Are you using your gifts for the benefit of the church?

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, great, good and generous giver,
Thank you for making me part of the body of Christ. Thank you that there are no unimportant parts to the body. Thank you that all of us are interconnected and interdependent.
We have a variety of gifts from you, but all have the same spirit.
We have varieties of service, but all have the same Lord, Jesus Christ.
We have various ways of working, but it is you, O God, who inspires all of it. Your spirit assigns your gifts as he wishes.
Thank you for every manifestation of your power and goodness. And thank you for every graciousness shown to me personally.
In the name of Jesus, the head of the body, I pray. Amen.

LESSON FIVE

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27 & HEBREWS 8:7-13

INTRODUCTION

How large is the Christian church? Certainly, it is larger than our local church, larger than our denomination or group of churches. How big is it? What is it that ties us to other believers here in our community and to believers in the universal church? Isn't it the presence of the Holy Spirit uniting all those who have found forgiveness in Jesus Christ?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) According to 1 Corinthians, what were we all baptized into?

2) Can the hand say that I am not a part of the body?

3) Who is the body of Christ?

4) What kind of covenant did God promise in the book of Hebrews?

5) What will God forgive and forget?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) What does the image of the body for the church tell you about individual members of the church?

2) What does the image of the body tell you about the gifts and talents that are distributed within the church?

3) Which parts of the body should we honor the most and consider the most important?

4) What is the nature of the new covenant we have in Christ?

5) What role does forgiveness play in the creation of the new community?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) What role do you play in the body of Christ?

2) Do you honor all members of the body equally?

3) What happens to the body if some people do not play their part?

4) What is important to you about the new covenant?

5) How important is it to you to know that you are forgiven?

Prayer

Oh Holy Spirit, as we gather as one body of many parts, we give you great thanks.
God, whether we are eyes, or hands, or feet, we are all part of this body.
In our individuality and in our collective, meet us and invite us into what it means to be this body.
By your grace and strength and courage and love and life, we say YES.
In your name we pray.
Amen.

From sarawg.com

LESSON SIX

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING

1 CORINTHIANS 15: 1-28

INTRODUCTION

The resurrection of the body is an ancient belief of the church. Certainly, believers cling to the hope we have in Christ for eternal life. Yet often this has been separated from a belief in the resurrection. What do we mean by resurrection and what is the nature of the hope we have in Christ? Why is it important to know that all creation will be redeemed?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

1) To how many people did the resurrected Jesus appear to?

2) How does Paul describe himself as an apostle?

3) If Christ wasn't raised from the dead, of what value is Christian preaching?

4) Christ is described as the first what of those who have fallen asleep?

5) What is the last enemy to be destroyed?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1) Why is Jesus' resurrection so important to the faith?

2) Why does Paul emphasize the many appearances of the resurrected Jesus?

3) What is the connection between Jesus' resurrection and our own?

4) What does it mean to be resurrected?

5) What would it mean if there was no resurrection at all?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

1) Do you wonder more about the reality of Jesus' resurrection or your own?

2) Do you think of your body playing any role in the afterlife?

3) Do you think there is any value to the faith if Christ has not been raised?

4) Do you view death as an enemy?

5) What do you think your resurrection body will be like?

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
May I realize afresh today, what Your death and resurrection mean to me. Forgiveness, freedom, and the ability to walk with You through this fallen world into eternity. May I always find my satisfaction in You and Your willingness to offer Yourself to me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.