

The Creed – Part 1

During this enlightening sermon series, I will frequently draw insights from the books penned by Justo Gonzalez and the small group book by Adam Hamilton. Their works, esteemed for their ability to explain matters of faith in a relatable manner, will be a rich source of learning for us each week. It is my sincere hope and prayer that, together, we will use each week as a stepping stone to enrich our Christian faith and life. These authors' works are a valuable addition to our journey, guiding us and enhancing our understanding of the Creed.

I would agree with both authors that some members of any congregation find the Apostles Creed meaningful to recite these ancient familiar words, remembering that fellow Christians of many church traditions have been confessing them for almost two thousand years and knowing that this very day all over the world, in all the languages of the world will say the Creed as they gather for worship, while others recite the words in an often mechanical way without giving much thought to the content and meaning of what they are saying. Hence, here is my reasoning behind this sermon series.

Frankly, there are both newer and older Christians, as well as those who are unfamiliar with the Creed and are not sure that they can honestly affirm what the Creed says. In fact, those who have not confessed their faith have no clue in many cases. People either repeat the words with a guilty conscience, remember that word “conscience” from last week, or have questions or reservations.

Should we say these words when we do not understand what they mean? This is a valid question that many of us may have. It's important to remember that it's okay to have questions or reservations about the Creed. It's through these questions that we can deepen our understanding of our faith. Why do we need this or any other creed? Should we not look to God's Word in the Bible rather than to some ancient words or modern human words to find out what we are to believe and do? These are not just great questions for us to consider, but I encourage you to actively engage with them, as they are crucial to our faith journey.

This ancient creed might have made sense a long time ago, but is it irrelevant to today's culture? Quite frankly, the church does need to be reminded of the decisions we are called to make when we stand and say, “*I believe.*” One thing I would like to caution people about is that we, and I, as your pastor, should not make any part of worship mechanical or too repetitive. Let's pray.

Omnipotent Father, empower us with a faith that moves mountains, a hope that does not waver, and a love that knows no bounds. May our time of worship this morning be a testament to Your immeasurable grace, a reflection of Your glory, and a celebration of Your mercy. In this moment, united in purpose and spirit, we lift our eyes to You, Saintly Jesus, our cornerstone and our redeemer. Let our worship be as incense, a sweet-smelling savor unto You. Amen.

As we begin, where did the Apostles' Creed come from? Well, for centuries, legendary stories floated about scholars questioning the origins of the Creed, and it took historians a long time to trace its origin. One circulated legend was that throughout the Middle Ages, each of the

twelve apostles proposed a particular clause: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon, Thaddaeus, and Matthias. Definitely not true. It was not until the fifteenth century, just before the Protestant Reformation, that Western scholars began questioning the legends of the Creed. Still, yet today, there are disagreements over some details. However, we now know the Creed dates as far back as the middle of the second century.

The earliest ancient forms of the Creed often changed in structure according to the challenges each church was facing, seeking to summarize the 'rule of faith' while employing similar wording. We must realize, looking back at the first centuries, a variety of religions, superstitions, and other belief systems circulated beyond the first Christian era, and thus, defining the central doctrines and identity of Christianity became vitally important. Here is something I did not know: Most ancient creeds formed from their connection to baptism, each maintaining three essential parts, referring to each part of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During the first centuries, candidates preparing for baptism, already in the water and before each of three immersions or pouring of water over the head, would know what they were affirming following the question: Do you believe? Again, in those days, at least by the fourth century, baptisms usually took place during Lent on the night before Easter. By the time a candidate was ready for baptism, each would know the meaning of what they were affirming.

Since the fourth century, infants have generally come to the font for baptism, and since then, the use of the Creed has become less prevalent, only to become a simple declaration of the faith of the church, with little or no connection to baptism. Now, we ask the parents and the church to raise the child, saying, do you, as parents, and we, as a church, accept the responsibility to teach them the faith? Although the Creed is thought to be apostolic, it serves as a reminder pointing to the central doctrine of our faith identifying the universal power of God, creation, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and His presence through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Something not true of the Apostle's Creed is that it is the most commonly used and most accepted document of the ancient church. What we now know as the Nicene Creed, although less familiar among Western Christians, is more widely accepted than the Apostle's Creed, primarily because of its simplicity. What happened is that the Nicene Creed is more difficult to memorize. Still, in contrast, the Apostle's Creed focuses on the life of Jesus, which follows a chronological order that can be learned relatively quickly: "Born, suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended, rose, ascended, is seated, will come."

The Apostle's Creed affirms many things that people find hard to believe. For this reason, many people would rather not have the Creed recited in worship, especially when someone is still seeking faith. We have to be careful and teach what these words mean to the church. Teaching what these words mean is why I am presenting this sermon series. Sometimes, they skip phrases they do not believe or utter them with a deep feeling of unease, while others simply mumble along so as not to attract attention. We should then think it would be helpful to think of

the Creed not so much as a personal statement of faith but rather as a statement of what it is that makes the church be the church and of our allegiance to the essence of the gospel.

Let's take the Pledge of Allegiance as an example. People recite the allegiance as a sign of patriotism and stand for the flag with "the Republic for which it stands." Some of those who recite it would personally question that the nation is "indivisible." to declare the nation as indivisible is to forget the horrors of the Civil War and that war must be avoided at all costs. Many who affirm that this indivisible nation lives "with liberty and justice for all" might question whether there is equal justice where abortion goes unpunished, where the poor lack essential resources, and so forth. A similar question arises about which parts we should keep and which to ignore. Each statement is, in fact, partly an ideal.

It is not so much that the Apostle's Creed is a personal statement of faith as it is a statement of the faith of the church, much as the Pledge of Allegiance shapes the identity of the nation.

There is a story about a young Orthodox priest who told his spiritual advisor that he had difficulties with some of the statements of the Nicene Creed. His advisor told the young priest to recite it anyway. A few days later, he returned saying he could not, in good conscience—there is that word again—conscience, claiming he could not believe all the Creed said. Several weeks passed when again the young priest returned and asked, "Why do you insist I repeat the Creed when you know I do not fully believe some of the phrases." In reply, the elderly advisor said; Because it is not your creed. It is the creed of the church. Here's the point. When we recite the creed, we declare what the church believes regardless of what you or I find hard to believe.

In closing, if we were to rewrite the creed, we might leave out a phrase or two, possibly adding words about the place of worship in the life of the church. I believe so. However, we cannot pick and choose which parts we like or dislike. Through the centuries, those who found their identity in the same gospel we share and the same community of believers of which we are now part are nothing but redeemed sinners exploring why our faith matters. Amen.