



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

I Believe

Hebrews 11:1–3

Mark Mitchell

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series: The Apostles' Creed

When taking a long trip, I like to use Mapquest. I can put in where my trip will begin and end and then up come the directions. Right next to the directions is a visual map of where I'll be traveling. The cool thing about the map is it allows me to see in just a glance the big picture of my trip (major freeways and cities) but it also allows me to zoom in and get a more detailed picture of each road and town along the way.

When it comes to our faith journey, we need both a big picture map of where we're going as well as the ability to zoom in for a more detailed analysis of each point along the way. The Bible is our map, but it's about a million words long. It's a huge book written by many different people in a variety of places over a few thousand years. Every one of its 66 books zooms in on a particular place, time and subject. The details can be overwhelming.

This is why we've chosen to study the Apostles' Creed. This Creed gives us the big picture; in just 100 words it gives us a simplified road map. It ignores many of the details but allows us to see in one glance the main points of our faith.

You might wonder, what's a creed? The word *creed* simply means "belief." As a matter of fact, many Christians of former days used to call this creed "the belief." A creed is a brief statement of what's essential for Christians to believe. It's not called the Apostles' Creed because it was written by the Apostles, but it does reflect what they taught. What we now know as the Apostles' Creed started with a simple confession of faith ("Jesus is Lord") for new believers in the 2nd century. They added to that over a period of years until what we know today as the Apostles' Creed was agreed on in the 4th century.

Why do we need a creed? Why take 10 weeks to study it? I already gave you one reason: we need to know the big picture of what we believe. But let me give you a few other reasons. First, a creed is a point of unity for all Christians. The subtitle of this series is: *what all Christians everywhere have always believed*. Christians disagree on a lot of things. That's why we have Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Fundamentalists. This is something our critics often point out: how can Christians claim to have the truth when they can't even agree on what the truth is? But the Apostles' Creed is a unifying statement of what believers have always agreed on. We need that!

Second, a creed is one of the ways we correct and even fight false belief, what we call *heresy*. Many of the creeds originated

as a response to heresy. When the Apostles' Creed was written there was a group called the Gnostics who denied Jesus was a real man. They called themselves Christians but they didn't believe God would defile Himself and take on human flesh. That's why this Creed makes it clear He was a real man. Even today, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science all call themselves Christians, but they don't affirm this creed, and they're not. The Creed helps us identify where they've gone wrong and what you must believe to be a Christian.

Third, a creed is a means of discipleship. Let me introduce a word to you: *catechesis*. Some of you recognize that word because you grew up Catholic like I did and had to attend catechism classes. I'm not talking about that. The word *catechesis* is a biblical word that simply means "to teach." In the early church, when someone wanted to become a Christian and get baptized they had to be catechized first. Many of them came from pagan backgrounds and knew nothing. So they'd go through a period of preparation and learning and what they used was the Apostles' Creed. On the day of their baptism they'd actually confess their faith by reciting the Creed. It was a means of discipleship; growing up new believers. We need that today because, more and more, people who become followers of Christ in our culture have also been raised in a pagan environment. They have no clue what they should believe. It's not enough just to accept Jesus. Who is Jesus? Why did He come? What did He accomplish? The Apostles' Creed tells us.

If you just take a glance at what this Creed says you can see it includes all that's essential to what we call the Gospel: the Trinity, the creation, the incarnation of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, the forgiveness of sins, and our hope of eternal life. All in all, the Creed is kind of like the Pledge of Allegiance. We say the Pledge because it defines who we are as Americans: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. There may be times when some of those things are threatened or we're not even sure we believe it, but we say it. Why? Because it unifies us, it wards off wrong thinking and it's a great tool to teach our young what it means to be an American. It's no different with the Apostles' Creed.

Today I want to look at the first line of the Apostles' Creed, but before I do that, turn to Hebrews 11:1–3. This will be our text as consider the words, *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth*.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

I believe in God.

The Creed starts with a powerful assertion: *I believe*. These words are repeated later in the Creed as well. Notice this is a very personal statement. It's not *We believe* but *I believe*. But what does it mean to believe? When we talk about belief we're really talking about faith. In the Bible, those two words are the same. Faith = belief. But what is faith? Our text tells us: Faith is "confidence in what we hope for and assurance in what we do not see." You can see faith is more than just agreement to a list of propositions. When you put your confidence in something; when you receive assurance from it that means much more than just agreement.

Faith means trust. When I declare *I believe* in God it means much more than just believing in the existence of God. It means I put my trust in God. It's not just a cold, cerebral idea that enlightens my mind while leaving my heart untouched. Faith is a response of my whole being to the person of God. It's like an anchor. Just like an anchor ties a ship to the ocean floor, so my faith ties me to God, and that brings security. Whatever storms life may bring, this anchor of faith ties me securely to Him.

But that's not all. Faith also means commitment and obedience. If you read on in Hebrews 11 you see many examples of faith: Abraham, Moses, Rahab and Noah. In each case they didn't just believe, but their faith expressed itself in commitment and obedience. Abraham was called to go to a strange land, and by faith he went. Noah was called to build an ark for no reason other than God said it was the only way to survive the coming flood, and by faith he did. That's why James says just believing isn't enough. He said, "***You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder***" (Jms 3:19). And then he goes on to say that "***faith without deeds is useless.***" It's like going to a doctor. It's not enough to just say you believe in your doctor. If you really believe in him you'll trust him and do what he says. If he wants you to take a particular medication, you do it. If he wants to lay you on a table and cut you open, you'll let him. That's faith.

The Creed affirms *I believe in God*. It doesn't try to prove the existence of God. There are good reasons to believe in God, but you really can't prove His existence. You can't disprove it either; again, it's matter of faith.

When you say, *I believe in God*, what comes to your mind? Fire and smoke? An old guy with a white beard sitting on a throne? Blinding light? George Burns? What's He like? I'd say the most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when

you say the word *God*. The fact is we can know nothing of what God is like apart from Him revealing Himself to us. But God does reveal Himself.

In believe in God the Father Almighty.

God, the Father

The Creed tells us how He has revealed Himself: *I believe in God the Father Almighty*. The first thing the Creed says is when you say the word God what comes to your mind should be Father. What does that mean? The Bible speak of God as our Father in a couple of ways. First, there's a sense in which He's the Father of all people because all people depend on Him for their existence. Mal 2: 10 asks, "***Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us?***" Paul says in Eph 2:14-15, "***For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.***" So in the sense we all owe our existence to Him, God is the Father of all.

But don't misunderstand that. The Bible also teaches there's another sense in which He's Father. Jesus called Him Father and taught us to call Him Father in a special sense. On one occasion He got into an heated discussion with some Pharisees who said, "***The only Father we have is God himself.***" But Jesus said, "***If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me... Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires***" (Jn 8:41-44). We also know Jesus taught His followers to pray, "Our Father, who is in heaven." Not everyone can call Him Father in this sense. Calling God our Father is only possible in this sense by loving and obeying His Son.

There are two words that describe how it comes to be we can call God our Father in this intimate sense: regeneration and adoption. Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again, not of natural birth but spiritual birth. When that happens we're born into a new family and God is our Father. That's regeneration. It also talks about adoption. Through Jesus we're adopted into His family. Paul writes, "***But 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'***" (Gal 4:4-6). It's only through adoption we can call Him Father in this sense.

When we call Him Father what do we mean? Well, any notion of God as an impersonal being or force is ruled out. God is as personal to us as a Father is to His children. He cares for us, loves us, protects us and provides for us just as human fathers do their children. He knows us as human fathers know their children. He knows our weaknesses, problems and secrets. As our

Father, He also has authority over us. We owe Him our respect and obedience.

Not all of you had fathers like this. For you it may be hard to call God Father because your father abused or abandoned you. Let's face it, all human fathers fall short of our heavenly Father. It might help to remember what Jesus once said, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*" (Jn 14:9). Think of the love, care and kindness of Jesus and that's the Father's love for you.

God the Almighty

But that's not all. It doesn't just say to think of Him as Father, but *the Father Almighty*. This points to what theologians call the incommunicable attributes of God. These are His attributes He doesn't share with any other. God is all powerful, all knowing. He's eternal and unchanging. He's not limited by space or time. These things don't mean God is capricious or acts on a whim. He's not a loose cannon. Almighty God is reliable; He makes promises to His people and He keeps them.

At the burning bush, God called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. Moses said, "Who are you? Who should I tell the people you are?" What did God do? He revealed His name: Yahweh. That's not just a label, but the core of His identity. It means *I am who I am* or *I will be who I will be*. That means He can't be hindered from being what He is and doing what He wills. He is the Almighty One! When the translators of the Bible had to come up with a word for that, they simply rendered it the Lord.

When we say He's *our Father Almighty* we're reminded that all power and authority in this world come from God. That means Presidents and Prime Ministers and all those who rule or lead in any capacity are subject to Him. We should keep that in mind as we elect a President this year.

When we say He is *our Father Almighty* we're also reminded that things impossible to us aren't impossible to God. Jesus said, "*What is impossible with man is possible with God*" (Lk 18:27). Some of you are facing impossible circumstances. This Creed reminds you God can overcome the impossible in your life.

The most important thing about you is what comes to mind when you say the word God. He's your Father; the Almighty One.

I believe in God...creator of heaven and earth.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (v. 3).

But He's also your creator. This is what the next line of the Creed says: *creator of heaven and earth*. Look again at Heb. 11:3. God is the creator of all things and He commanded all things, both spiritual and physical, into existence out of nothing.

This means His creation is good. All things God has created are good. He created giraffes and bobcats, kumquats and papayas,

thunderstorms and sunsets. There's nothing God has created that isn't good. One of the implications of this is we need to care for His creation. We're stewards of His creation. This past summer Lynn and I visited several National Parks: Grand Tetons and Glacier to be specific. What spectacular places! I'm so glad we have laws to protect these places because they're magnificent. I want my children and their children to enjoy them just like I have.

When we affirm God as Creator it also means God is **not** His creation. There are some who worship the creation and not the Creator. There are some who say God is in all things in a way that He's not distinct from His creation. That's Pantheism. Pantheism says God and His creation are identical. But as Creator He's separate from and above His creation in the same way an artist is separate from his art. You see a great piece of art and it impresses you but you don't worship it. You turn to the artist and you praise him.

Why is it so important to confess God as our Creator? Because it means we're not cosmic accidents; we're not devoid of value. If we have a Creator, we have significance. He made us. He made us alone in His own image of God. We're the crown of His creation. Philosopher Martin Heidegger says modern man is plagued by two problems: we don't know where we came from and we don't know where we're going. He calls it *thrownness* in that we feel chaotically hurled or thrown into life. The only certainty is death. Darwinian evolution puts us at the top of the evolutionary chain but does nothing to provide a sense of meaning to life. It leaves us devoid of worth and dignity. But to know we've been lovingly and thoughtfully created is to affirm our basic worth as human beings.

Affirming God as Creator begs the question of how this creation took place. This is an issue of much debate and controversy, even among Christians. Some believe in some form of evolution and that God oversaw the entire process. Others affirm a literal interpretation of Genesis and leave no room for evolution at all. Part of the debate centers around how Christians view the scientific enterprise as well as how they interpret Scripture. Some see science as the enemy; others see it as something we can use in the service of God. One thing is for sure, science has limits. It can't answer ultimate issues for us. You can't put love or truth or beauty under a microscope. The creed doesn't tell us **how** God created. The key thing isn't the **how** of creation but the **who** of creation.

Let me leave you with a few questions.

First of all, is your big picture road map adequate to take you all the way through life? Are you missing some major chunks that will leave you lost as you try to get from point A to point B? What

you believe will affect how we live. The Bible not only teaches about how to live, but it teaches theological truth and doctrine and that impacts how we live. Without growing in your knowledge of truth, you won't grow spiritually. I want to encourage you over the next nine weeks to memorize the Apostle's Creed. You already got the first line down, right?

Second, how is your faith in God being demonstrated? Our text tells us God commends faith; He's pleased with faith. How would your life look different if faith wasn't part of the equation? What are you doing right now that wouldn't make any sense apart from your faith? Don't settle for a faith that's all up in your head but doesn't impact the way you live.

Third, what comes to mind when you hear the word God? Do you know Him and trust Him and draw near to Him as your

Father? His arms are wide open for you. Do you know Him as the Almighty One? He can do the impossible in your life. Sometimes that just means He can sustain you through impossible situations. Do you know Him as your Creator, the One who lovingly crafted you and gives you meaning and worth and purpose? It's not enough just to know about God; we want to know God personally.

The most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when you say the word God. *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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