

October 31, 2016

Lutheran Words: “I Believe” Hebrews 13:8-9a

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Does it really matter what you choose to believe about God? We live in a day and age where most people say, “No, it does not really matter what a person chooses to believe about God.” We live in a culture where everybody’s beliefs are supposed to be equally valid. No matter what a person chooses to believe about God, the world out there says, “It’s cool.” No matter how wacky or weird, how passionate or dispassionate a person’s beliefs about God may be, society’s response is, “It’s alright. Whatever you believe is totally up to you. Believe what you want. It doesn’t really matter.”

Are you hearing that message in our culture? Are you noticing it?

The law of the land says that we can’t impose our beliefs on anyone else, and that’s a good law. But when our post-modern American culture implies, insinuates, and loudly insists that nobody’s belief system is any more significant or valid than anybody else’s – that your beliefs are just your beliefs -- I hope and pray that, as a Christian, you’re recognizing the danger in that message. I hope that, as a Christian, you’re resisting and objecting to that kind of societal pressure.

Our Lutheran word for today is “believe.” Every week, here at Hope Lutheran Church, we stand up and we say what we believe about God. We read, or we rattle off from memory – or, hopefully, we’re proclaiming with sincere conviction – the words of the Apostles’ Creed. “I believe in God the Father ... I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord ... I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Does it really matter what you choose to believe about God? I believe it does. God believes it does.

Now wait a minute. God didn't write the Apostles' Creed, did he? The Creed is not part of the Word of God that Pastor Wagner preached about last week. It's a human creation. So why do we Lutheran Christians return to the Creed week after week in our worship services? Why is this what we believe?

Many of you know that this statement of belief emerged from the very earliest years of the Christian Church. We don't know if the apostles themselves wrote it; but it's an excellent, concise summary of what the apostles, who were taught by Jesus, in turn taught the Church. Because even in those early days, there were people spreading contrary views: about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about how to be saved. The apostles had to work hard to explain the Gospel, over and over again. The Church, in every age since, has had to be diligent and steadfast about not letting our core beliefs about God get twisted up or shoved aside.

So this Apostles' Creed has been for centuries one of the best ways to keep the Church's beliefs straight and true. This is what we believe about God. This is what the apostles of Jesus were taught about God, and what they passed on to the early Church. This is a statement of beliefs about God that are drawn directly from the Bible, and are consistent in every way with the Bible.

Our text for today, Hebrews 13:8-9 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings." In other words, Christian, be careful. No matter if you live in Bible days, or in Luther's

time, or in this modern era of Christianity, you have to hang on to your belief in God, or you can be led astray.

Yes, it does matter what you choose to believe about God! The Lord is not changing with the times. God isn't adapting to what post-modern American culture is saying about him. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The world constantly shifts around us, and our culture every single day pulls us in all sorts of directions. But God wants his people – you and me – to be faithful in our beliefs today, and tomorrow, and forever. "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings."

Now, no one would accuse Hope Lutheran of being the most hip, edgy, trendy church around. But I think it's pretty cool that we stand up and say these same words of belief in God that Christians have been saying for almost 2000 years. I'm proud that we know what we believe about God, that we say it forthrightly, that we teach it to our kids, that we stand by our beliefs – and I hope you're proud of it, too.

And here's the real bottom line as to why it's so important. There's a world of people out there who need to know the God we've come to know and believe in. There are 56 million Americans – ¼ of our population – who are not affiliated with any religion, or are agnostic, or atheist. And all 56 million of them are sinners, just like we are. They've got family problems, and marriage problems, as we do. They're battling cancer, fighting addictions, worried about kids, wrestling depression, and grieving lost loved ones the same as we are. If they filled out prayer request cards like we do every week, they'd write down the exact same things that we do.

But there's a world of them out there who don't know who to pray to, who to turn to. They don't know how much God

loves them. They don't know how to get right with God, or how right God is for them. They are your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers and classmates. Does it matter what they believe about God? It does. Does it matter that they come to know the God we know, to trust in his love the way we trust in his love, to experience his grace and mercy as we do? It matters. Because they matter to God.

And that's why it matters so much that we have our beliefs straight. The culture out there, that's full of strange and diverse teachings? That's our mission field! The people out there who don't think it matters what they believe? Those people matter to God, and so they matter to us.

Luther famously said, centuries ago, "Here I stand." He knew what he believed, based on the Word of God. Lutherans today need to say, "Here I stand, and here I go," taking what we believe to the world. For Jesus' sake. Amen.