

July 8, 2012
1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Pentecost 6 (Catechism #2)
Apostles Creed: I believe...

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, along with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Many of us have grown up in the church; we have learned how to behave in church. We have been taught the foundations of our faith. We have been taught the stories from God's Holy Word. Now after many years of coming to services it's almost like we go through our service in just rote memory. We speak the Lord's Prayer without praying it...and if we do pray it we don't know what we are praying. We sit back and listen to the readings and the sermon...with only some fidgeting and sleeping. We sing the hymns, perhaps. We confess our sins...halfheartedly perhaps. There is that other point in the service as well when we make a public confession of our faith.

Many people don't know why we confess or what we confess in the creed. Many of us sat in confirmation classes years ago and don't realize anymore what we believe. Today we continue our journey through the catechism as we pull apart the Apostles Creed.

American Christian culture is predominantly noncreedal. It believes there's something wrong if you declare, "This I believe" when speaking of the Creed. One says, "Deeds, not creeds." Another says, "It's my freedom to believe what I want. Don't tell me what to believe."

It's tempting to buy into this culture and say, "it doesn't really matter what anyone else says what anyone else says about the Bible. The only thing that matters is what it means to me." People develop strange notions about the Bible when they abandon the creeds of the Church. They become pleased with their ignorance.

Did you know that the Bible contains creeds? Our text today is an early creed. Paul quote it to the Corinthians, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Doesn't that sound similar to the Apostles Creed?

The creeds have been the bread and butter of Christian teaching for over 1500 years. We use the three ecumenical creeds (namely the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian) because they summarize the Bible's teachings.

As I was preparing my message this week I learned that St. Augustine would teach the catechism once a year. He would teach the catechism during the season of Lent. By his day around AD 400, Christian instruction using the Apostles' Creed had already been taking place for about 200 years. As we meditate on our Christian faith as confessed by saints throughout the ages and reflected in the Apostles Creed, we're in

good company. For this reason Martin Luther identified the Creed as a chief and important part of Christian doctrine.

The creed is divided into three parts, concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Today we are going to pick apart each one of these articles in a brief manner.

In our Old Testament lesson we read the story of the creation. Before God uttered the words, "Let there be light," there never had been a day before.

Did you notice something quite interesting as we read through the catechism today, especially with the first article? He made it personal! Asking, the Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" he answers, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul..." And he still takes care of me today!!

There was an evening and a morning when each of you individually had your first day. Did you know who gave that first day to you? God did. God the Father gave you your first day.

Luther says in the Large Catechism, "If you were to ask a little child, 'My dear, what sort of a God do you have? What do you know about Him?' The child would say, 'This is my God: first, the Father, who has created heaven and earth. Besides this One only, I regard nothing else as God. For there is no else who could create heaven and earth.'" Later he says, "This is what I mean and believe, that I am God's creature....I mean that He has given and constantly preserves....for me my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, reason, and understanding, and so on."

Unfortunately many people only know the God of nature, the God of creation, the God of power, the God of might, the God of hurricanes and tornadoes, the God of rains and wildfires, the God of lightning and floods. Luther says, "The First Article ought to humble and terrify us all if we believed it. For we sin daily...with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and possession, and with everything we have." Our sin offends the creator. It is wonderful blessing that the Creed goes on to teach about the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

In the First Article, you learn that God gives you ALL that you have. In the Second Article you find out that God gives you ALL that he is. Luther writes, "He completely poured forth Himself...and withheld nothing from us." God gave YOU ALL he is when he gave his only-begotten Son.

We read the meaning earlier... "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord."

Some people will say, "Jesus is Lord. You must make Jesus the Lord of your life; make him the boss of your heart." But here's what Luther says: "I believe that Jesus Christ, God's true Son, has become my Lord. But what does it mean to become Lord? It is

this: he had redeemed me from sin, from the devil, and from death, and from all evil...Let this, then, be the sum of this article: the little word Lord means simply the same as redeemer.”

If Jesus had not died on the cross, do you know who your Lord would be? Sin, death, and the devil. For Jesus to be your Lord isn't something that You do. It isn't putting Jesus on the throne of your heart. It is Jesus stretching out his hand and allowing himself to be nailed to the cross. “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” When He has become my Lord through his death on the cross, then “I will be his own and live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”

In the Second Article, we learn that God has given himself to us, all that he is in the person of Jesus, our Savior. That should be enough, right? God created you, gave you your eyes, ears, fingers, and toes and then he gave you his Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins to be your Lord, your Redeemer. That should be enough, but it's not. Jesus knew that it wasn't enough. The Holy Spirit must be given.

In John 15, Jesus promises, “But when the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

Jesus died on the cross. That is an objective reality. It happened. But unless the Holy Spirit applies the reality of Jesus' death on the cross to you, to your heart, it remains hidden from you. There are many people in the world for whom Jesus died who know nothing about him. Or they may know the facts about him but have rejected him, refused to believe in him as Savior. The Holy Spirit must give you faith.

The work of the Holy Spirit is Sanctification, the work of making you holy. He does this when he calls you to the Gospel, enlightens you with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith.

The Holy Spirit connects you to Jesus, his cross, and his resurrection. He does this through the Means of Grace, Word and Sacraments. Luther says this in his Large Catechism, “How is such sanctifying done? Answer, ‘The Son receives dominion, by which He wins us, through His birth, death, resurrection, and so on. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit causes our sanctification by the following: the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.’”

I believe that you have faith in Jesus. How did you receive that faith? You received it through the Church. Whether you know it or not, members of the Holy Christian Church brought the Word of God to you. For some it was the Word connected to the water of

Baptism. For others it was the Word proclaimed in a sermon or shared over a cup of coffee. Possibly it was the Word printed in a booklet given to you. But it was the Church that the Holy Spirit used to bring you to faith.

He uses the Church to keep you in the faith. Luther writes this: "The Spirit has His own congregation in the world, which is the mother that conceives and bears every Christian through God's Word." Next comes this famous quotation of Luther, "I believe that there is upon the earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ... This group is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind and understanding, with many different gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schism." This is you. The Holy Spirit has made you a member of that little group, the Church. It may not appear to the world to be successful, but success in the world can often be counterfeit to God. By the calling of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, you are part of this little flock.

In some sermons of mine I highlight text, italicize, capitalize and bolden text. This is so I make sure to change my voice or make sure I don't miss a point. So here is one last quote from Luther that is boldened and italicized, ***Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live.*** That's why we're here. The Church exists for people to come and know their Savior Jesus and his precious blood shed on the cross to receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, the resurrection of the body, and that life everlasting. That's the creed that we believe.

There is so much more that can be said on the Creed...but this historic creed, this statement of belief has been passed down and has stood the test of time as a summary of our Christian faith. May God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit keep you in that faith. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.