

I.N.I.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
September 1, 2019
First Article

In Christ Jesus, the Son of our Heavenly Father, Who is Maker of heaven and earth, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

All of us do it at least three, maybe four times a month in church. At the appropriate time in the service, the pastor says, “Let us join in confessing our Christian faith in our Triune God with the words of the Apostles’ Creed,” and we begin our response with these words: “I believe.” We did that earlier this morning. But what’s all involved in this creed?

The Apostles’ Creed is one of the most widely used articles in all of Christianity. Almost every Christian denomination recites, reads or sings these words in their church services. Contrary to its name, it was not written by the apostles. It does have its beginnings as far back as their day, but as far as we know it was not written by any of the apostles themselves. It was called the Apostles’ Creed because it was what the apostles taught and believed. All of the facts and statements found in this creed are taken directly from God’s Word, the same Word that the apostles held to be inspired by God the Holy Spirit, in fact the same Word that the apostles wrote by inspiration.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word “credo.” It means “I believe.” The very first words of our creed: credo—is “I believe.” Therefore this creed is a very personal thing. It is not something that someone else can speak for you. It is something that must come from here—the heart, your heart and mine. The word “believe” means to trust, to rely on, to accept as being true. No one can trust for you; no one can rely on something for you; no one can have faith for you.

Therefore this creed is our own individual expression of what we believe.

It is like Noah swinging the hammer for 120 years in building the ark. It means—“I believe, I am confident that what God says, He will do. The flood will come”

It is like Abraham leaving his homeland for a land he did not know. It means—“I believe, I am confident that when God tells me to go, He will not only go with me but will even lead me.”

It is like Peter getting out of the boat in the middle of the lake in the midst of the storm. It means “I believe, I am confident that if the Lord calls me to walk toward Him, He will give me the power to do so.”

It is like Stephen facing death at the hands of the angry mob. It means—“I believe, I am confident that when God calls me home, He will carry me safely home.”

So we say, “I believe.” But in what and in whom do we believe? As you know the Apostles’ Creed is divided into three articles, each article corresponding to a person of our Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The same God in whose name we began this morning’s worship service. The only true God!

Each of these three articles has an italicized heading in our Catechism. These headings list for us the three-fold work of our God. First Article: **CREATION**. Second Article: **REDEMPTION**. Third Article: **SANCTIFICATION**.

Today we are discussing the First Article. The article itself is very short, in fact the shortest of all three: **I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.**

Yes, God is our Creator, therefore He is called the Father of All people. Malachi 2:10 reads: **HAVE WE NOT ALL ONE FATHER? HAS NOT ONE GOD CREATED US?** This passage you could recite to an African, European, Asian, North or South American, and it would be true. Every person on earth has one Heavenly Father, for one God has made us all. In his meaning to this First Article Luther writes: “**I believe that God has created me and all creatures.**” Yes, all animal and human creatures in this world.

Well if there is only one Father, the Father of us all, then why are there so many religions who teach that there are many different gods? Is it true that they all worship the same god, but just call him by different names? That’s what many people believe. The answer is no. The god of the Hindus and the Buddhists and the Mohammedans is not the same God as the Bible, the Christian’s God.

God also did not just create this world and then go off letting it run by itself as so many also people believe, letting chance, luck and fate take their toll. God in His powerful Word not only created everything, giving it its start, but continues to supervise everything. God continues to rule over, protect, preserve, provide, guard and defend His creatures with that same power. The power of His Word.

By His Word God created everything. He said, “**Let there be,**” and it was. That same powerful Word of God is still present today, present right here in the Bible. That is where the problem with man comes in. God made the world, still preserves and keeps it and reveals Himself to the world only through His Word. We will not find God by meditating within ourselves. We will not find God by getting high on drugs. We will not find God by looking at other people. We will not find God by communing with nature. We will not find God in the Koran, the Veda, the Confucian Canon, the Book of Mormon or any other religious books of the world. He is only revealed to us in His Holy Word, the Bible.

But first we must ask, “How do I approach this God in whom I believe?” Some of us have been approaching God for so long that we perhaps don’t even think about how. Do I approach Him only sporadically or periodically like some stranger to whom I nod and smile? Do I approach Him with fear and trembling seeing only His holy face of justice? Do I come to Him only when I am in trouble and at wits end? Should I drape my arms around Him like some old buddy with whom I feel on equal terms?

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY! Must I not approach God with a sense of His greatness and my littleness--His majesty and my nothingness--His eternality and my mortality? And even more than that, must we all not approach our God with an overwhelming sense of His total holiness and our utter sinfulness? Like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, overwhelmed not so much by the boat full of fish, but by his soul full of sins—my only reaction can be, **"DEPART FROM ME, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD!"**

We were all conceived as children of Satan, enemies of God, dead in our sins. We had nothing to bring before this Almighty God of ours to appease His wrath or to satisfy His justice. When we recognize this, we utter words such as “Be merciful to me,” not because we ought to, but because we have to. In His presence we can say nothing more. With empty hands and a trembling heart, we approach our holy, almighty God.

We lost our right as God’s children to come before Him because of sin. Yet, we can call Him our Father almighty, not because we have earned the right to do so but because He has given us this privilege. In His love, and entirely because of His grace, He has adopted us into His family. We can call Him “Father,” because He first called us “child.” Paul writes in Gal. 3:26 **FOR YOU ARE ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS. FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST.** We are God’s children through Jesus, therefore He is our Father. Paul again writes in Eph. 3:14-15 **FOR THIS REASON I BOW MY KNEES TO THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, FROM WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED.** The Greek word for “family” comes from the word “father.” Therefore, we are a family, that is, one who has come from the Father.

God is our Father in this way only by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul again writes in Gal. 4:4-6 **BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW, TO REDEEM THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION AS SONS. AND BECAUSE YOU ARE SONS, GOD HAS SENT FORTH THE SPIRIT OF HIS SON INTO YOUR HEARTS, CRYING OUT, "ABBA, FATHER!"**

The word “Abba” is Hebrew for “father,” a word that the early Christians used in their prayers and which is still used by many of us today. The first prayer our little children learned was, “Abba, Father. Amen.”

This is the Father of whom we are speaking in the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed.
God the Father—the Creator of All people.
God the Father—the Father of all those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
God the Father—the Father of His Son Jesus

This is the Father that Martin Luther says has **“given me my body and life, eyes, ears, and all my bodily members, my mind, and all my senses and still keeps them for me. God also preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all my property and all that I need to support this body and life. He protects me from all danger. He guards and defends me from every evil.”**

Luther lays before us the many, many items that God provides for us richly and daily. For many of us the problem is not that we don't have such things but that we have grown so accustomed to having them in abundance. So many of us have forgotten that important word “need”---**“All that I NEED to support my body and life.”** It is not “all that I want,” but “all that I need.” Our Father is not far off in the heavens—unaware, uncaring, and unavailable. He is right beside us with His hands wide open to provide for our needs daily, hourly, minute by minute.

In our second Scripture reading and in some of the passages on the back page of our bulletin we also see that our Heavenly Father protects us day by day. We live in a world of evil and danger--evil and danger that we don't even realize or are aware of. Many of us can point to dramatic ways God has rescued us. Maybe delivery in surgery, perhaps a miraculous delivery from an auto accident, maybe a fall that only brought about bumps and bruises and not greater harm. And what about the many, many times when His protection goes unnoticed? What about the many mornings we wake up refreshed from a good night's sleep without a clue about the danger he kept away from us that night?

And why, why does our Father do all of this and give us all of this? **“Because He is my good and gracious Father in heaven, not because of anything I have done to earn or deserve it.”**

All of these are indeed great blessings and gifts from our Heavenly Father, gifts we clearly do not deserve because of our many sins. And that brings us to the greatest gift of all—the forgiveness of sins and the gift of everlasting life which our Father has given to us through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Brother, our Savior and our Lord. God **DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?...FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE...GOD, HAS SAVED US AND CALLED US WITH A HOLY CALLING, NOT ACCORDING TO OUR WORKS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE WHICH WAS GIVEN TO US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE TIME BEGAN, BUT HAS NOW BEEN REVEALED BY THE APPEARING OF OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS ABOLISHED DEATH AND BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.**

God's gift of His Son to live for us and to die for us has given us forgiveness and life everlasting. Our response? To thank, praise, serve and obey Him. Thank and praise Him with our heart, lips and mouth; serve and obey Him with our bodies and lives.

Our Father's love for us is endless—endless in love; endless in mercy; endless in time. Should we not as His children, redeemed by His Son our Savior, return His love with our lives, coming to him with our prayers; worshipping Him with our hearts; singing to Him with our lips and voices and obeying Him with our bodies and minds?

May God our Father give to each of us His children the desire to live as His children, trusting in Him and thanking Him for all of His blessings.

Amen.