

SESSION ONE:
WHAT ARE THE CREEDS?

pilgrum

In this session we explore the reason the Creeds were developed and the role they play in Christian life and faith.

Opening Prayers

The heavens are telling the glory of God
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

**One day pours out its song to another
and one night unfolds knowledge to another.**

They have neither speech nor language
and their voices are not heard,

**Yet their sound has gone out into all lands
and their words to the ends of the world.**

In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun,
that comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber
and rejoices as a champion to run his course.

**It goes forth from the end of the heavens
and runs to the very end again,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.**

PSALM 19.1–6

Eternal God, the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you: grant us so to know you that we may truly love you, so to love you that we may truly serve you, whose service is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AFTER AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430)

Conversation

Who are your great heroes or models of faith? They may be characters from the Bible or people from history or people you know.

Reflecting on Scripture

Reading

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁴By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. ⁵By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and 'he was not found, because God had taken him.' For it was attested before he was taken away that 'he had pleased God.' ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

HEBREWS 11.1–10

Explanatory note

The word translated here as 'faith' could also be translated as 'belief'. Why not reread the passage inserting 'belief' instead of 'faith' and see if it feels any different?

Hebrews 11 tells the story of some key Old Testament characters from Genesis who all displayed faith:

Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4.1–16).

Enoch is mentioned only briefly in Genesis 5.24 and is said to have been 'no more' because God took him. Out of this brief reference grew speculation about what happened to him after God took him. This speculation can be found written down outside the Bible in books such as 1 Enoch.

The story of Noah and the flood can be found in Genesis 6–9.

The story of the call of Abraham begins in Genesis 12 and continues for many chapters after that.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them
- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises

Reflection

STEVEN CROFT

Belief and trust

Christians recite the creeds as part of our worship regularly but we don't always understand what we are doing. There is more going on here than agreeing together on the content of our faith or reminding one another about orthodox Christian doctrine.

The key lies in very first words of the creed: 'I believe' in the Apostles' Creed and 'We believe' in the Nicene Creed. The word 'believe' means far more than to agree with something or to give assent to it. It carries much more of the meaning of to place my trust and confidence in something. Remember the replies the candidates make to the questions in baptism:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in all the world?

I believe and trust in him.

As we stand to say the Creed week by week in public worship, we are deliberately placing our confidence once again in the living and loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Every Sunday, every resurrection day, we make a new commitment and a new beginning.

Why is that so important? It is important because during the past seven days – or however long it is since we were together with God’s people – our faith will not have been stable or steady. All kinds of things will have happened in our lives.

Some of those things will have been good and will have deepened our sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to God. But some of those things will have been difficult and challenging to our faith. We may have been tested by suffering or the suffering of those close to us. Our prayers may not have been answered. We may have been moved with compassion by the suffering in God’s world. We may be asking deep questions of God and of our faith. We may have been hurt by those close to us or by other members of the Christian family.

For all these reasons, God’s people need a clear moment as we gather together of belief and trust and confidence – a moment when, together, we place our faith and trust once again, at the beginning of the new week, in the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In short

Believing is not just about what we think but is about trust and confidence. Saying the Creed each week means that each week we place our trust and confidence in God.

For discussion

- Why do you believe it is important to come to church and gather with other Christians Sunday by Sunday?
- What are the things that most commonly happen to you to disturb your faith and trust in God?
- What are the things that most help you trust in God again and move forward?

Living by faith

According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Jesus' call to those who would follow him had two elements: 'repent, and believe the good news' (Mark 1.15).

This is in some ways a once-and-for-all, life-changing event. We make a decision in private prayer and public confession of faith to be disciples of Jesus Christ. But it is also a commitment to a regular habit of being changed and transformed in our minds – the core meaning of repentance – and continually placing our trust again in the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is exactly what happens when we gather to worship together as the people of God: we repent of our sins as we confess them together and we place our trust and confidence in God again as we declare our faith in the words of the creed.

This saving faith is right at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Paul writes over and over again in the letter to the Romans that we are not justified – set right with God – because of anything we do or any rules that we may keep. We cannot set ourselves right with God. We are justified through faith, through trusting in what God has done in and through Jesus Christ.

It is this story of God's saving love which is told and retold in the creeds. God in his love has made us and all the world (creation). God in

his love has saved us from our sins through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (redemption). God in his love is changing us to be more like his Son and making us holy by his Spirit (sanctification).

We are determined to live by faith and not by sight.

Hebrews 11 offers us a powerful description of what it means to have faith (11.1). More importantly, it gives us powerful examples of men and women who lived their lives by faith in God's promises – the way we are called to live today. Every time we say the creed we are embracing that kind of faith and declaring that we are determined to live by faith and not by sight.

In short

Jesus' key message was 'repent, and believe in the good news'. When we do we make a commitment to a regular habit of being changed by God and of putting our trust in him.

For discussion

- Where are you tempted to place your confidence and trust if not in God?
- Can you describe a moment when you have wandered away from faith and trust and been restored?

Journeying On

Make a note this week of the things that happen in your daily life or in events elsewhere which disturb your faith and confidence in God.

When you gather with God's people this week, offer that list to him and deliberately place your trust once again in his promises and mercy.

Concluding Prayers

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray,

Our Father ... (see p. 12)

Wisdom for the Journey

Most people are enclosed in their mortal bodies like a snail in its shell, curled up in their obsessions after the manner of hedgehogs. They form their notion of God's blessedness taking themselves for a model.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (C.140–C.220)

Every concept formed by the intellect in an attempt to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not in making God known.

GREGORY OF NYSSA (C.330–94)

Thirst was made for water; inquiry for truth.

C. S. LEWIS (1898–1963)