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The Apostles' Creed in 2016

A 12-part series



emc

The Apostles' Creed is an early Christian confession that during the Protestant Reformation provided common ground between different parts of the Christian Church. It still does today. This booklet explores the Creed's articles; its use by early Anabaptists; and how it can be used in congregational worship, instruction, and discipleship today.

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The Apostles' Creed: in History and to be Lived

by Terry M. Smith

We believe in God the Father
We believe in Jesus Christ
We believe in the Holy Spirit
And he's given us new life
We believe in the crucifixion . . .

The popular song *We Believe* performed by the Newsboys is based on an early Christian creed, a statement of faith passed down to us. Yet, as our conference youth minister Gerald Reimer asks, how many EMC young people realize this? We might also ask, how many EMCers can say even the short Apostles' Creed, let alone the longer Nicene Creed?

Are we concerned about people of all ages expressing and living their faith? Absolutely. Do we want to increase biblical understanding? Yes. Do we want our churches to be bold in their confession shown in lifestyle? Certainly.

That's why throughout 2016 a series will explore our Christian Faith as expressed within the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed—each by a different writer.

Scripture, A Common Treasure

At our best we are devoted students of Scripture—that's a rich legacy from our sixteenth-century Anabaptist-Mennonite forebears. We study as do the Bereans (Acts 17:10-15). Pastors uphold Paul's counsel to Timothy to carefully interpret God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Scripture is our common treasure to be studied by all EMC members and interpreted together, not just by a priestly or clergy class. When early Anabaptists were interrogated, their biblical knowledge surprised their examiners. Even today, some of our EMC members have read the entire Bible several times.

Yet we cannot take for granted our historical devotion to Scripture. Later Anabaptist history and some modern events provide a caution. Some Mennonites warn members against reading the Bible lest they get new ideas. What a curious shift when post-Vatican II Roman Catholics are encouraged to read Scripture while some current Mennonites are not.

In A Few Words

How would we sum up the Bible and the Christian faith? We might quote, "For God so loved the world that he have his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"

(John 3:16 NIV). That's commonly known as "the gospel in a nutshell."

Or we could say with the first-century apostles and members: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve" (1 Cor. 15:3-5, 11).

Or consider the hymn-confession where God became a man who humbled himself to death on a cross, was exalted, and before whom every knee should bow (Phil. 2:6-11). Or look at another confession Paul quotes: "He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up on glory" (1 Tim. 4:16). Consider the "faithful sayings" that Paul repeats (1 Tim. 1:15, 4:9; 2 Tim. 1:15; Titus 3:8).

To distill these and other statements, we end up with something close to the Apostles' Creed. We have our own fine summary—the EMC Statement of Faith—but it's too long to recite in a worship service. The Apostles' Creed is a short bold confession. Can it be repeated thoughtlessly? Yes. So can Scripture. Must we stop quoting Scripture because of that?

A Reminder

Because the development and use of the Apostles' Creed predates any of us now living, it provides a reminder: we are inheritors of the Christian Faith and not automatically its best interpreters. Even for devoted careful students of Scripture, we need to be cautious about some of our assumptions.

Dr. James Reimer, formerly of Conrad Grebel College, said, "I have often felt that we as Mennonites (not



to mention Evangelicals) hop, skip, and jump a bit too quickly from the present straight to the Bible, maybe with a brief touch-down in the sixteenth century. We do not have a strong enough sense of the historical development of ideas and beliefs.”

Reimer said, “Increasingly, however, I sense that what has gone on between the first and sixteenth centuries, and the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, has shaped us much more profoundly than we have admitted.” For him, the classical doctrines, the creeds, the writings of early post-first-century leaders “need to be taken more seriously, not only by Mennonites, but by modern Christians and modern theologians” (*Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 327).

Common Ground

As we sift, the creed shows our common ground with other Christians. This is how Anabaptists used it in sixteenth-century Europe where they and their persecutors had it in common. Their disputes did not revolve around the Creed, but around its implications.

Menno Simons wrote to a Reformed leader that Anabaptists agreed on the “twelve articles.” Balthasar Hubmaier used the creed as part of a baptismal confession. Peter Reidemann, the early Hutterian leader, used it as the structure for his Confession of Faith. The Swiss Brethren of Hesse used it in dialogue with Reformed leaders. In doing so, early Anabaptists brought out their special concerns—its ethical implications, as Dr. Terry Hiebert and others say.

Five centuries later some Roman Catholics and Anabaptists do not understand that we have the Apostles’ Creed in common. When Anabaptists start a church, it’s

The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
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,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
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.

easy for Roman Catholics and those of other large denominations to dismiss us as people of a strange confession with a reduced sense of doctrine and history. Why should we let ourselves be misunderstood in this way?

When it comes to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or church planting, there’s value in using the common ground of the Apostles’ Creed. If children and adults of various church backgrounds identify with us, they benefit; if they ultimately remain where they are, they repeat and live out the creed with richer insight.

History First

In this series the creed is used as a confession about historical events that took place or will take place in “space and time” (Francis Schaeffer’s term); it then explores the meaning and implication of these historical events. As Alan Richardson, an Anglican professor, has said, Christianity “bases its whole view of the universe and human destiny upon certain historical happenings” (*Creeds in the Making*, 7).

When the creed says Jesus was born of a virgin, he was. When it says Jesus was raised from the dead, it happened physically on Easter morning outside Jerusalem—not solely in the hearts of believers.

Is metaphor used in the Bible? Yes. Scripture contains many rich, instructive forms of expression. This said, that God has acted in Christ in history remains central to our confession (Luke 1:1-4).

In a first-rate expression of honest thinking, the apostle Paul said, “If Christ is not raised, your faith is futile” (1 Cor. 15:17). Yet Paul, a former persecutor converted in an unexpected encounter with our risen Lord, said, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:8, 20).

The apostle Peter said, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). Peter was later crucified upside down outside Rome. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, Peter’s death makes sense; his and our confident hope in Christ will be vindicated.

By exploring the majestic coming of Jesus, we will be nourished and challenged during 2016, reliant upon the Scriptures blown on by the Holy Spirit.

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Terry M. Smith (Rev.) is executive secretary to the Board of Church Ministries, which has a mandate in Christian Education. The series is a BCM Education Committee project.



The Twelve Greatest Words Ever Put on Paper!

by Russell Doerksen

At its core, the Apostles' Creed is the basic description of what it means to be a Christian. By digging into it, we can gain new insights into our personal beliefs as members of the EMC. We can learn more about our history as both Christians and as human beings, and we can learn more about other believers throughout all of Christianity.

We begin this journey through the Apostles' Creed by looking into the meaning and implications of the most powerful, encouraging, and awe-inspiring twelve words that have ever been put to paper: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

'I Believe'

It is only fitting to begin looking into the common statement of Christianity by focusing on the phrase, "I believe."

"I believe" in two words lays down two important truths. The first is that Christianity has to be a personal response. While this may seem perfectly obvious to us today, throughout much of the world and much of history personal belief was expected to be the same as group belief. While it is not likely that the "I" here is a criticism of that method of believing and conversion, it does mean that Christianity is not wholly compatible with it either. To put it simply, at some point in their life, every individual Christian must come to the beliefs laid out in the Creed.

More interesting though, is the word "believe." Beliefs often have a bad reputation today, as something that only foolish people have. That is too bad as belief is something

Belief is understanding how things work together to some beautiful end.

fundamental to the human experience. Belief is understanding how things work together to some beautiful end. Whether your belief is in an all powerful God, or is purely rationalistic, belief is essential for understanding why things are the way they are.

As such, it is important that the word chosen for the Creed is "believe." That one word changes the meaning of the Creed significantly. The Creed is, without a doubt, something that is thought and it is also to many of us something known. But at its heart the Creed is a big statement. The Creed is an explanation of the whole point of life, death, and all of creation: to know God and to have a relationship with him.

Knowing this, let's go to the next line and the core of the Apostles' Creed.

'In God the Father Almighty'

In this statement there are two equally important parts: the designation "God the Father" and the word "Almighty."

As members of the EMC and as Christians, we believe that there is only one God. With the term "God the Father," the Creed is presenting us with the first aspect of the oneness of God. The first part of the Trinity.

God is referred to as the Father often throughout Scripture (1 Cor. 8:6, Mal. 2:10, Isa. 63:16), which means it is an important way that God has revealed himself. God is

referred to as the Father of creation, of Christ, and of humanity. To the Biblical writers, the term Father means, among many other things, that he is authoritative (Rev. 1:8), strong (Psalm 68:5), merciful and comforting (2 Cor. 1:3-4), demanding of respect (Rom. 15:6), wise (Mark 13:32), and creative (John 1:3).

It is interesting to note that in calling God "Father," Scripture does not seem to be saying that God is male. If it were, then it would make little sense that God calls humanity, both male and female, as made "in his image" (Gen. 1:26). This is not to say that Jesus, God made human, was not male, but instead that when talking about "God the Father" Scripture does not seem to be talking in terms of gender.



This is fine, though, as God is fundamentally beyond our understanding. Yet he has chosen to reveal himself in the way that he has. God is not simply male and not simply female. God is fundamentally more than either of these things. God is God and yet God is a person.

God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—perfectly communal, perfectly powerful and perfectly loving. God is all present, all powerful, and all knowing. Before anything else was, God was; all there ever was and will ever be is dependent upon him.

To put all of this together, God is Almighty. To say that God is anything less than Almighty is to make God into less than he is, and woe to anyone who chooses to do something as foolish as that.

‘Creator of Heaven and Earth’

That God is Almighty is important to Christian faith because if he was anything less, he would not be God. He would not be worthy of anything, let alone our worship.

However, we know that God is worthy. We know that God is God. We know that God is Almighty because this is shown by his being the Creator.

Genesis 1 says that our God is so powerful he does not even need to expend effort in creation. He says, “Let there be light,” and there is light (1:3). “Let there be fish in the sea and birds in the air” (1:20) and there are. Creation simply is because it is the will of God.

Most importantly, God himself says that his creation is “good” (1:31). We often downplay the importance of this simple phrase. We do this when we say, in some form, that everything (people, planet, universe) “needs to be done away with because it is fallen.” We do this when we think of things in terms of being discardable. Such a view goes against something basic we are to believe about God: he is the One who creates, who can call into being what is not yet. God is the Creator.

While creation is shot through with sin (Gen. 3), to be sure, and things are less than they were created to be (Rom. 3:23, 8:19-22), that does not mean that this planet has stopped being, ultimately, the good creation of God.

Beneath the effects of sin on us and our world, God is able to see what he intends to yet call forth. To fully believe that God is Almighty is to believe that he is incapable of making something that, even when wrought with sin, could be considered fully bad.

God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—perfectly communal, perfectly powerful and perfectly loving.



To say that God is Almighty, and to say that creation was called “good” by that Almighty, is to say that creation in all its glory can never be thought of as beyond all hope. To say God is our Father, our Almighty Creator, is to say that creation (people, planet, universe) will, in the end, fulfill the purpose for which it is made. Some of humankind may choose to fight against the will of the Almighty, to their loss, but ultimately his good will shall come to pass.

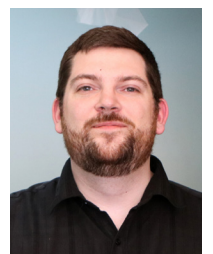
A Rich Future

If we say that “I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth,” we are saying together this and nothing less: We believe in a God, wonderful beyond full human comprehension, who has revealed himself to us out of his love for us. We believe that out of his love he created all that was, is and will ever be. We believe that as the Almighty, his good purposes will ultimately be fulfilled.

In response to this, we are also saying that we need to trust and serve him. As a part of his creation, we need to treat all that God has made in the way that it deserves as something that God himself said was “good.”

This gives me a rich future, joy, and hope. Thanks be to God!

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Jesus, Born of the Virgin Mary

by Pastor Eric Isaac

The Apostles' Creed says that Jesus "was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." Although this is the only virgin birth humanity has seen, it certainly is not the only improbable birth it has seen.

Improbable Births in the Bible

A few years ago one of the ministers in our church shared the observation that the Bible records many improbable births. Isaac was born to a 90-year-old mother and 100-year-old father (Gen. 21). After almost twenty years of marriage Isaac and Rebekah finally had twin sons because Isaac prayed (Gen. 25:21). Rachel only had children after "God remembered" her and "enabled her to conceive" (Gen. 30:22).

The patriarchs are not the only ones who received children in improbable situations. Samson was born to a woman who was said to be "unable to give birth" (Jud. 13:2) and Samuel was born to a woman with a closed womb (1 Sam. 1:5). In the New Testament John the Baptist's mother was "unable to conceive" and both of his parents were "very old" (Luke 1:7).

Based on all of this, could we say that creating life in a barren womb is one of God's favourite miracles?



Based on all of this, could we say that creating life in a barren womb is one of God's favourite miracles?

Was Mary Really a Virgin?

As Christians we believe that the Bible records several improbable births and the impossible virgin birth of Jesus. Of course from a scientific perspective a virgin giving birth is impossible. Because of this some people have questioned if Mary really was a virgin. A person could ask questions like: Was Mary literally a virgin or was she just a pure-hearted young woman? Does the Bible even teach that Mary was a virgin?

Matthew and Luke both make it clear that Mary was a virgin while she was pregnant with Jesus. When describing how Jesus was born Matthew writes: "His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18).

Joseph intended to end their relationship because his fiancé was pregnant with a child that was not his. However, an angel told him, "do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (v. 20).

Matthew tells us that after that dream Joseph "took Mary home as his wife" and that "he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son" (vv. 24-25). Matthew wanted to be absolutely certain that his readers knew that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Luke was like Matthew in this way. According to his gospel the angel told Mary, "You will conceive and give birth to a son" (Luke 1:31). Mary's response to this was a very natural one: "How will this be since I am a virgin?" (v. 34). This is a telling question. A pure-hearted young woman who made a mistake and slept with her boyfriend once does not ask this question. This is the question of a woman who has never slept with a man.

Just like Matthew, Luke tells us that Mary's baby would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Luke 1:35 the angel says to Mary, "the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35).

A careful reading of Matthew and Luke's accounts show us that they both knew Mary had never had sexual intercourse. She was not just a pure-hearted young woman. Therefore, the virgin birth is not an unscriptural teaching of the Church; it is an idea clearly taught in the Bible.

The virgin birth is a picture of salvation. God reached out to Mary and created a life in her. God reaches out to us.



Why Did Mary Have to be a Virgin?

So Jesus was born of a virgin, but why did God choose to do it this way? Why couldn't Jesus have had two biological parents?

Jesus had to be born of a virgin because he was both God and man. In John's gospel we are told that Jesus, whom John calls the "Word," is God (1:1). In that same chapter John tells us that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (v.14). Jesus is both God and human.

God: the Giver of Life

Earlier I asked if the virgin birth and the other improbable births in the Bible mean that creating life in a barren womb is one of God's favourite miracles. Maybe it is not God's favourite miracle, but it is worthwhile to note how often God does this. Could this be because physical life being created in a barren womb points to spiritual life being created in a barren heart?

Giving life to the spiritually dead was a part of Christ's mission. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). He told Nicodemus that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" and that "flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:3, 6). Jesus came so that people could experience a

She was not just a pure-hearted young woman. Therefore, the virgin birth is not an unscriptural teaching of the Church; it is an idea clearly taught in the Bible.

spiritual birth which would lead to spiritual life. God, in his mercy, wants all people to be made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5).

The virgin birth is a picture of salvation. God reached out to Mary and created a life in her. Likewise, God reaches out to us, and if we accept, we become a new creation and there is new life in us.

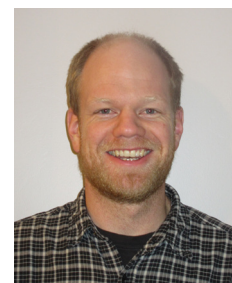
Two Desired Outcomes From This Study

I hope studying this topic affects us in at least two ways. First of all, I hope it gives us a renewed sense of awe. A virgin gave birth to a child—this is something only God could accomplish. I hope we ponder this miracle; I hope we're amazed by this miracle and I hope we worship God because of this miracle.

Secondly, I hope this study will remind of us of the miracle of conversion. Choosing to become a Christian is different than choosing to become an electrician or choosing to vote for Thomas Mulcair. When a person chooses to be a Christian they are made alive in Christ, they are born again and they become a new creation. No human can comprehend this miracle, let alone duplicate it.

Let us praise the God who gives life to the barren womb, gave the virgin a Child, and gives abundant life to the penitent sinner.

Eric Isaac loves his wife Jennifer and their three children (James, Clara, and Emily). He graduated from Steinbach Bible College (BA, Pastoral Ministries) and is pastoring the Morweena EMC.



We Are More Than Conquerors Through Jesus!

by Mark von Kampen

Article 4 focuses on Jesus, suffering, and death—a central theme in Christian thought throughout the ages: “...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”

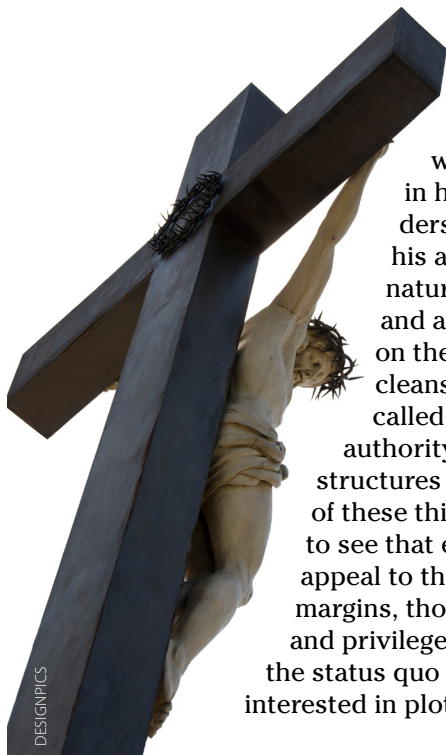
By mentioning the historical figure Pontius Pilate, the creed places all of what we believe about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, into a particular place in the flow of world history reminding us that, in Jesus, eternity touched our human timeline in a very real and particular way.

As governor of Judea, Pilate represented the power and authority of the Roman Empire further reminding us that, in Jesus, the Kingdom of God touched ground amidst particular human power dynamics and political realities.

The Reality of the Kingdom

Although Jesus never came to establish an earthly kingdom as some of his followers hoped and as some of his opponents feared, he embodied, modeled, and taught the reality of the Kingdom of God. In calling his disciples to “seek first the Kingdom of God,” Jesus invited them to give it their ultimate allegiance, living as Kingdom citizens and ordering their lives by its values.

In Jesus’ own demonstrations of power, it’s not hard to see how Jesus aroused feelings of suspicion, jealousy and insecurity from those in positions of power. Look at the way he spoke and taught “as one who had authority,” in his “signs and wonders” which showed his authority even over nature, and in his words and actions like healing on the Sabbath. And the cleansing of the temple called into question the authority of established structures and practices. In all of these things, it’s not difficult to see that even as he had mass appeal to the powerless on the margins, those who held power and privilege and benefitted from the status quo became increasingly interested in plotting his death.



Jesus Knew What He Was Doing

Although the Apostles’ Creed says nothing about Jesus’ life and ministry, the Gospels make it clear, given the opposition Jesus faced, that his suffering, crucifixion, and death, were the logical outcome of his life and teaching. Jesus knew what he was doing and where it was leading.

Jesus also wanted those who chose to follow him to be aware of the path that his life was on, telling them, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected... and he must be killed” (Luke 9:22). He also warned those who wished to follow him that to do so required a readiness to walk the same path of suffering, saying, “Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

The Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, and the Chief Priests represented the religious establishment that felt threatened by Jesus. Pilate represented empire. Together these powerful forces joined together to do away with Jesus.

In the end, though, even the fickle masses and even Jesus’ disciples seemed to be implicated in Jesus’ death. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. The disciples abandoned him. And the crowds that cried, “Hosanna in the highest heaven” in one breath yelled, “Crucify him” in the next.

Though the creed states that Jesus suffered and died under Pontius Pilate, all were in some way implicated in his death.

The Horror and the Wonder

And here is both the horror and the wonder of the cross where Jesus willingly lay down his life not only at the hands of sinful humanity, but for its salvation. For not only were all implicated in Jesus’ death, we all are also the beneficiaries of his death. And not only did Jesus’ death impact a particular time in the history of sinful humanity, the cross reaches backwards and forwards through all of history encompassing even us today.

Jesus didn’t try to talk Judas out of betraying him. Jesus didn’t resist his arrest. He didn’t try to persuade Pilate to let him go at his trial. He didn’t try to win the favour of the crowd that yelled, “Crucify him.”

He didn’t resist the abuse of the soldiers or the mob as they beat him, forced him to carry the heavy cross, crowned him with thorns, and mocked him. Nor did he resist his executioners as they nailed him to the cross. Rather Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Through the cross, the power of those words transcends time.



Jesus submitted to all the powers that sought his undoing. It looked as if the powers had triumphed as he was nailed to the cross, as his side was pierced, as he hung there lifeless and as his body was taken and sealed in the tomb. But the cross was not Jesus' defeat, but rather his triumph, for the cross would not stop him and the tomb would not hold him.

Different Facets of Saving Power

There's great mystery and wonder in the cross that our minds cannot fully grasp. Different passages in the Bible express different facets of its saving power.

Passages like Hebrews 2:14-15 remind us that, through his death on the cross, Jesus triumphed over all powers of resistance to God's Kingdom, freeing all who turn to him from those powers, even from death itself. "Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death."

Passages like Romans 3:24-25 remind us that, through the cross, Jesus bore the weight and consequence of the sins of humanity, suffering and allowing his own life to be sacrificed in place of ours. "They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood."

As Anabaptists we have also taken seriously those scriptures that speak to our own identification with the suffering and death of Jesus and his redeeming work.

Other passages like Romans 5:8 remind us that Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate demonstration and example of God's love for us. "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."

Still other passages like Colossians 1:20 remind us that the impact of the cross is not limited to setting things right with humanity, but that

somehow all of creation falls within the scope of its saving power. "Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

The cross has remained central to the church's understanding and identity. The Scriptures are rich in images that help us get a sense of the unfathomable breadth and impact of Jesus' death on the cross.

Our Identification With Him

As Anabaptists we have been careful not to overlook the connection of the cross to Jesus, life and, teaching and also to its vindication in the resurrection. As Anabaptists we have also taken seriously those scriptures that speak to our own identification with the suffering and death of Jesus and his redeeming work. "We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

In all these facets of Jesus' life, suffering, and death, we who put our trust in him are more than conquerors. All praise and thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Christ Rose, Take It Personally

by Pastor Kevin Wiebe

In the Apostles' Creed we read, "He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again." One of the core beliefs of Christianity is that after Jesus died, he descended to the dead and on the third day he rose again, and this event has some extremely personal implications for every one of us. While there is some interpretive danger in personalizing certain elements of the Bible, when it comes to Jesus' rising from the grave, the danger rather lies in not personalizing this miraculous event.

We call this miraculous event the resurrection. Jesus was dead, but he came back to life. This sort of thing does not simply happen naturally. There are times when someone's heart stops beating temporarily, or where people were falsely diagnosed as dead and later wake up, astounding others.

But for Christians around the world, we believe that Jesus really and truly died. It was not just some trick or a false diagnosis. Jesus died. Not only that, but he also rose again. He came back to life, after having experienced death.

If we as Christians really believe this, then it is worth asking the question that my former philosophy professor is so well known for asking: "But is it true?" In other words, did the resurrection really happen?



But Is It True?

Josh McDowell is a well-known author and speaker. In his days in university, he was an atheist and he could not stand Christians. One day when he was trying to convince a believer that their beliefs were false, they challenged him to prove it. So McDowell set out to disprove the Bible and Christian belief.

He put the Bible on trial, to measure whether or not the facts it claimed were historically accurate. One of these claims that he put to the test is this question: "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?"

Over the course of his intense study and investigation, he came to the conclusion that the Bible is true. Though McDowell has written much about this topic, together with his son Sean, he wrote a short volume called *77 FAQ's About God and the Bible: Your Toughest Questions Answered* (Harvest House, 2012), which includes a question about whether the resurrection actually happened.

Jesus Actually Died

McDowell sets out three reasons for believing in the resurrection. The first is the fact that there is more than sufficient evidence—historically speaking—that Jesus actually died.

It was not just a trick or false declaration of death. There were multiple written eye-witness accounts; the book of John reports a spear wound to Jesus' side, where blood and water came pouring out (a sure sign of death); and there are even accounts from credible Roman and Jewish historians who recorded the death of Jesus. This was not just a misdiagnosis. Jesus really died.

The Tomb Was Empty

The second reason is that the tomb was empty. The religious leaders, who had far more power than a few scared disciples, could have destroyed Christianity simply by revealing Jesus' body, but they could not. If it was about creating a false religion, the disciples would not have started in Jerusalem if there was any doubt about Jesus being alive.

If the authorities would find Jesus' body, then the new religion would fall. If there was any doubt on this point it would have been far more logical for the disciples to start their religion in a far away land, so that if the leaders would find Jesus' body, their religion might still survive. But there was no body to find, so the disciples had no fear of being found out in this way.

Additionally, McDowell reminds us that if someone were trying to start a false religion in that day and age, it



for Christ, then our hope is only for this life and our religion is pitiful. Without the resurrection, our entire belief system is essentially worthless. But, the resurrection did happen. Jesus was raised from the dead. So then, what does that mean for us? Well, it means that we who are in Christ “will be made alive.” It means hope for this life—but more than that—hope for the next life.

This Is Personal

As the Apostles’ Creed says, “He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.” When we hear things too often, we can sometimes lose sight of what it really

would be completely irrational to include the testimony of women, who in that era were not seen as reliable witnesses. It would have been far more effective to only include the testimony of men. But the Gospel writers report the first testimony of Jesus’ resurrection as being from women. For a false religion, this would not make sense—unless this was not false at all, but a truthful report.

Eyewitness Accounts

Thirdly, McDowell reminds us about the many eyewitness accounts that were recorded in many places of people who saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion. Though this is a brief summary, if one looks at the all the evidence together, the only logical conclusion that can be drawn is that the resurrection of Jesus is a historical and true event.

What Does It Mean?

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (vv. 14, 20-22).

Paul speaks very boldly on this point. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then neither will we be raised from the dead after we die. If there was no resurrection

means. Such statements in creeds and in theology can become too familiar, and we lose sight of the fact that this has personal implications for each of us. Jesus descended to the dead, to the place that was destined for all who broke God’s law. Someone once put it this way, “Jesus

went to hell so that you would not have to.”

Though this is part of the historic Apostles’ Creed, it is not just a useless platitude. Jesus loved you enough to descend to the place of the dead—in your stead. And because he rose again, all who are in Christ will also rise

again. Though we may shed this mortal coil, death does not mark the end of existence for all who believe in Christ. As Paul writes, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Jesus broke the chains of sin and death, welcoming all who call on his name to be partakers of his life and hope—inviting you to join the ranks of the redeemed and relish the life and peace that he offers.

While there is some interpretive danger in personalizing certain elements of the Bible, when it comes to Jesus’ rising from the grave, the danger rather lies in not personalizing this miraculous event.

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The Ascension of Christ

by Dr. Arden Thiessen

“**H**e ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” Christian attitudes to the ascension of Jesus have ranged from benign neglect by preachers who don’t know what to say about it to fierce criticism by those who say the event is completely at odds with the accepted modern heliocentric worldview. They say there is no place in space for a place like heaven.

Important Details

One could wonder, why didn’t Jesus simply vanish as he did after his evening encounter with the believers in Emmaus? However, it was notable event, and I suggest the disciples were expected to see some important details of God’s relationship to the world in that event.

The ascension is reported in Luke 24 and Acts 1, at the end of Luke’s story of Jesus’ earthly life and at the beginning of his story of the Spirit’s work in the world. It marks the transition from what God did here in the person of Jesus to what he will do as Holy Spirit.

Luke 24:51 simply says Jesus was carried up into heaven. Acts 1:9 reports that he was lifted up and then a cloud took him away. I imagine Jesus rising in front of their eyes, as if sucked up by an unseen cosmic magnet. When he reached a height of half a mile or so, a cloud floated by to cover him and then when the cloud moved on he was gone. Later the apostles said and wrote that he had gone to the Father’s right hand. However, nobody saw that; they just saw him disappear, quite inauspiciously. And that was that.

Interpreting the event is difficult because the New Testament uses the same word for what we call the sky and for the eternal presence of God. The disciples stood there, looking at the empty sky (heaven), but Jesus had transitioned to the Father’s right hand (heaven).

A Location?

I am not surprised that Christian believers have often thought of heaven as having a specific celestial location. After all, it is hard to talk about heaven without referring to it as a place. Mormons say heaven is in the

Interpreting the event is difficult because the New Testament uses the same word for what we call the sky and for the eternal presence of God.



vicinity of the mythical star “Kolob.” That is probably no more fanciful than the sermon by an EMC minister that I remember in which heaven was located near Polaris, the North Star. He based that little bit of esoteric knowledge on Isaiah 14:13 (KJV), completely ignoring the fact that Isaiah was blasting the king of Babylon with his diatribe. (By the way, Polaris is around 323 light years from the earth, by one astronomical measurement).

In recent years I have noticed theologians refer to heaven as being a “different dimension of reality.” Most notably that concept has been used by N. T. Wright. Recently I’ve noticed the term also in the writings of the American Baptist Millard Erickson and the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. Wayne Grudem agrees, “We cannot now see where Jesus is, but that is not because he passed into some ethereal ‘state of being’ that has no location at all in the space-time universe, but because our eyes are unable to see the unseen spiritual world that exists all around us” (Systematic Theology, p. 617).

Randal Rauser concludes, “The ascension does not consist of Jesus moving to a spatially distinct part of the universe (let alone another universe) but rather of entering a higher spiritual reality in our midst” (Faith Lacking Understanding, p. 129). Heaven is the other, the spiritual dimension of eternity.

A Dimension

I think the scholars mentioned above are helpful. Their approach helps us with a New Testament feature that has puzzled thoughtful readers. When Jesus concluded

I used to think that the ascension was the reversal of the incarnation. I've changed my mind.

instructions to the disciples, he assured them, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). We have wondered, how could he be with us, having officially, visibly departed.

If we accept the view above, then the ascension was simply moving from the visible to the invisible dimension. That's how the apostles could speak and write as if they continued to live in Jesus' presence. And then we understand why the future event that we have been taught to call "the second coming" (that term is never used in the Bible) is usually referred to as the appearing (parousia) of Jesus. One day he will appear again, step back over the line into our dimension.

The view above helps us with another biblical phenomenon, the occasional presence of angels. They are at home in the other, the spiritual or eternal dimension. Occasionally they are seen here with us. When Jesus arose he came out of the tomb with a new physical body, a body that would fit into the other dimension of reality. However, he could choose to be visible here, as did the angels occasionally. So, he came and went for forty days and then departed.

I used to think that the ascension was the reversal of the incarnation. I've changed my mind. Jesus went to heaven as a human. He left no human detritus on that mountain top. He was, of course, now a human with a transformed body. So one of us has already entered eternity.

Karl Barth says, "Christ is now, as the Bearer of humanity...in the place where God is. Our flesh, our human nature, is exalted in Him to God" (Dogmatics in Outline, p. 125). Rauser asserts, "Christ was made eternally man" (p. 121). C. E. B. Cranfield summarizes, "For we believe that he is still human as well as divine, that in assuming our humanity he joined it to his divine nature forever" (The Apostles' Creed, p. 45).

The Right Hand of God

The theologians of the New Testament say that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. Originally, that line was spoken to the king of Jerusalem (Ps. 110:1). To the writing apostles this seemed like the right image to use for Jesus' present position. It became the most used Old Testament quotation, used or alluded to seven times.

Theologians say the figurative image of sitting at God's right hand reminds us of the three roles of the ascended Jesus. First, the right hand is the position of honour. By taking that position Jesus assumed the relationship that he declared when he said, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30).

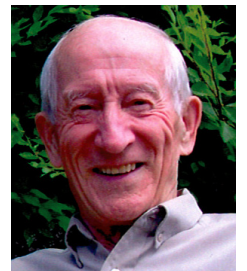


Secondly, the right hand is the position of authority. Karl Barth saw this as signifying that Jesus was supervising the gospel work of the disciples. He is Lord of the world and has the authority to send his followers everywhere. We should note that when the disciples came down from that mountain they rejoiced and prepared to go to work.

Thirdly, the right hand is the place of intimacy. Jesus has the Father's ear. Stanley Grenz emphasises this primarily, that Jesus is at the Father's right hand interceding for us.

And then there is Jesus talking about going to prepare a place for his disciples (John 14:3). He was probably not referring to a construction or renovation job or to some neglected housecleaning that he had to look after. Let's assume he means he will be there ahead of us, praying for us and waiting for us to join him there in the heavenly dimension (See John 17:24). I think it's probably a sign of healthy spiritual growth if we can appreciate that hope as well.

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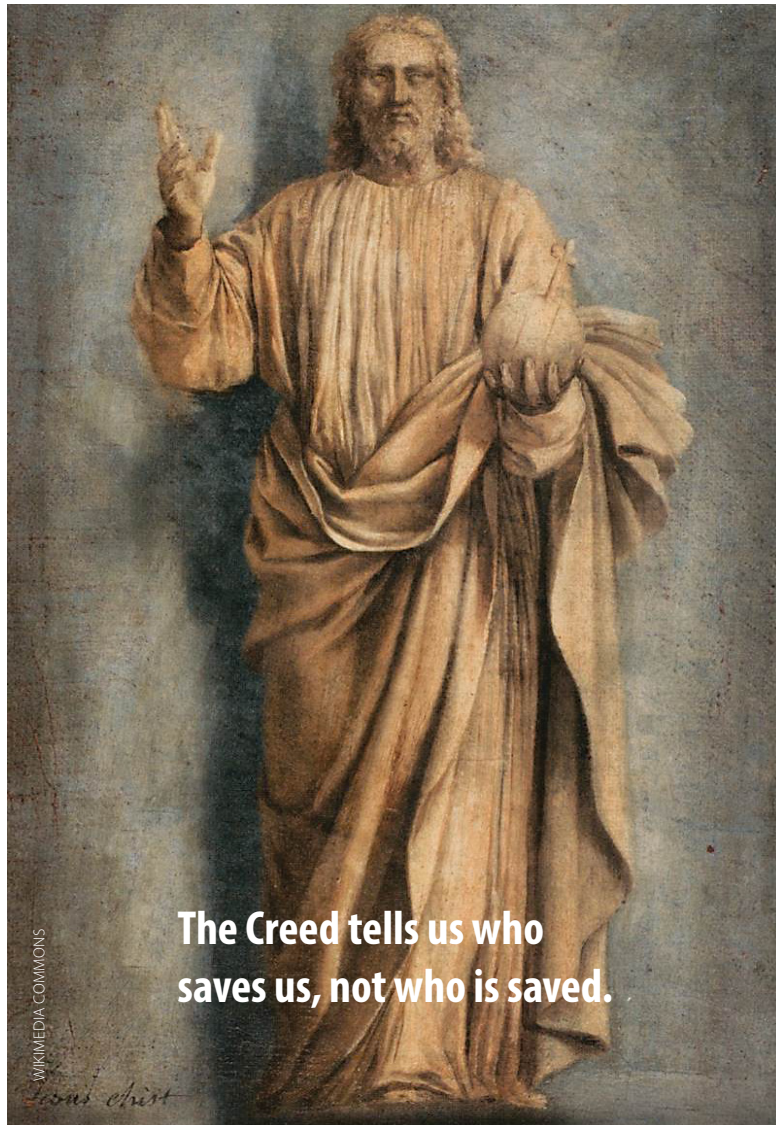
Christ the Judge: Our Hope and Future

by Shannon Doerksen

“**A**nd He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” Where do we find ourselves in the Creed? The Apostles’ Creed says very little about humanity. The historicity of Jesus’ life is made clear through the mention of people like Pilate and Mary, but other than that we only show up as the collective object of God’s relationship and work.

We are the people with whom the Triune God has to do. We are his creation, the object of his judgment, the body of the forgiven

By confessing Christ as Judge, we remind ourselves that the exercise of judgment is rightly his, not ours.



The Creed tells us who saves us, not who is saved.

constituted by the Spirit, who anticipate a physical resurrection and everlasting life.

The End of the World?

Does the Creed say anything about “the end of the world”? When we think of the Second Coming of Christ as Judge, we are in the realm of eschatology, or the last things, what is sometimes referred to as the “end of the world.” This describes the destination to which creation is directed, the fulfillment of God’s redemptive work for us.

Pertaining to the last things, we confess in the Creed that Christ is coming again, that he will judge, and who or what it is that he will judge. The latter ideas are what we are considering here. (Later in the Creed we confess our belief in bodily resurrection and everlasting life.)

Referring to the last things as “the end of the world” is a problem, as it is merely the end of the sin and death that distort God’s creation. “The end of the world” conjures up the idea that the created world is disposable or that humans are not a part of it and as such have no legitimate investment in it. Neither of these things is borne out in Christian thought—the world is God’s beloved creation, and it anticipates the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of his judgment as we do (Rom. 8:22). The world is our home and the location of our responsibility to it and to each other (Gen. 1–2).

Who is Saved?

Does the Creed say anything about who is saved? The Creed does not give us a rule for judging either ourselves or others as “in” or “out.” The identity of the Saviour and Judge is where we place our faith, not a checklist of isolated principles by which we believe him bound to operate under. By confessing Christ as Judge, we remind ourselves that the exercise of judgment is rightly his, not ours. The Creed tells us who saves us, not who is saved.

He Will Come Again

Who is “he”? He is Jesus Christ, God’s only Son. And if we confess that he is coming again, we

confess that he has come already. And just as he came, bodily, born of the virgin Mary and suffering under Pilate, we can expect him to come again, incarnate Emmanuel. He does not change; he is still in his Second Coming God-with-us. Our hope and security in view of judgment lies in the identity of the Judge.

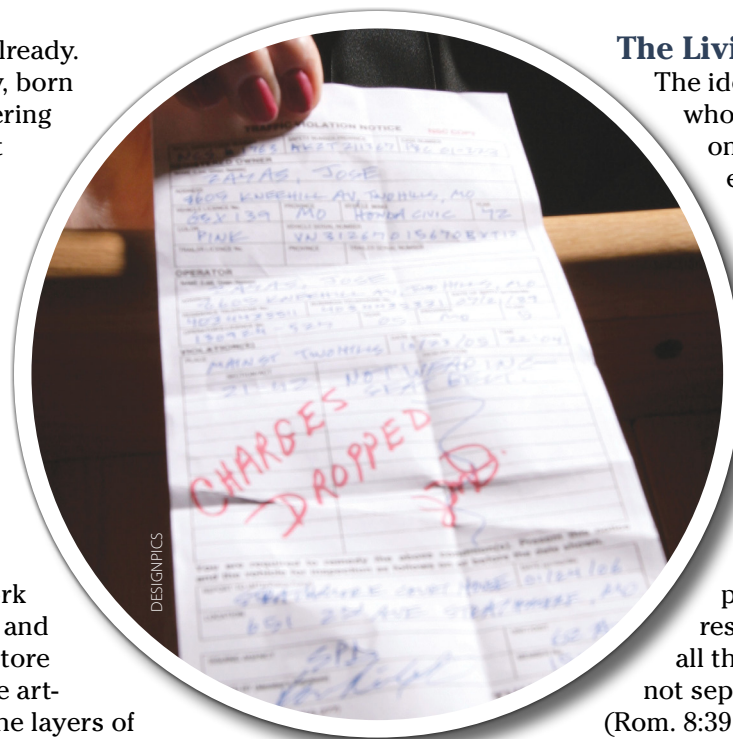
To Judge

One helpful way we can conceptualize judgment is like an art restoration. The artist's intention for the work has been marred over time and defaced with graffiti. To restore the art so that it reflects the artist's intention once more, the layers of grime and graffiti that obscure it need to be stripped off and discarded. This work is not undertaken by someone who has no care about or investment in the work of art. It is rather the artist's son, who was present and actively involved when the painting was created in the first place, who works on the restoration.

Judgment is a terrifying word to many. It is often presented synonymously with ideas of condemnation, punishment, even damnation. This rendering of judgment tells only a small part of the story. Judgment, really, is the setting to rights of all things—a vindication of those things that are good and reflective of God's intentions for his world, and a final, decisive rejection and snuffing out of those things that are not.

Judgment is the establishment of God's justice. It is indeed a scary prospect, as we know ourselves to be sinners. We know ourselves to collude with and benefit from injustice in myriad ways. We know ourselves to distort God's image in ourselves and our fellow humans. Again, however, the identity of the Judge is our hope. Our Judge is also our Saviour, our Priest (Heb. 4:15), the One who offers his own righteousness as our own before God the Father.

By confessing Christ as Judge, we remind ourselves that the exercise of judgment is rightly his, not ours.



The Living and the Dead

The identity and scope of those who are to be judged—everyone and everything, from every time and place. There is nothing and no one over which Christ's Lordship does not extend. In Scripture we read that Christ is Lord of the living and the dead (Rom.14:9).

And here in the Creed, we confess that we believe in the future realization, the undeniable visibility, of what is already true and accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection, his Lordship over all things. As even death does not separate us from Christ's love (Rom. 8:39, Psalm 139:8), so the dead are yet under his authority.

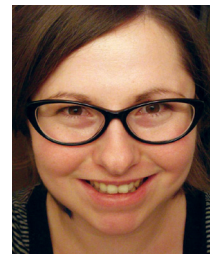
Why Does this Matter?

It matters because there is a point, a telos, toward which we are moving. We have something to hope for and even to work towards. Our confession of the coming judgment of Christ means we wait for the decisive establishment of God's justice in his world. This reminds us that the injustices we see in the world presently are the flailing lashes, the death rattles, of a defeated foe. The future of God's people and his world is secure.

This does not mean that we have nothing to do but sit on our hands and wait for the Second Coming. Rather, we are free to work with Christ towards this end, knowing that our fledgling efforts are not in vain because he himself secures the victory.

We are, then, invited to live in ways that correspond with God's justice, that make the world better reflect the intention of its Creator. He has shown us what is good, and what he requires of us—to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

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The Holy Spirit is Okay With Being Listed Last

by Pastor
Dwight Plett

“I believe in the Holy Spirit.” When we recite the Apostles’ Creed we affirm our belief in God the Father as the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. And Jesus is accorded a comprehensive (albeit short) biography. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is given only a passing mention, like one more item on a list.

I sometimes wonder how He feels about that. It’s not like the Bible is lacking content where the Holy Spirit is concerned. He plays such an incredibly important role in the story of the Church and in our lives, but He always comes third; and no matter how Trinitarian we are in our theology, we’re inclined (consciously or subconsciously) to think of Him last. I’m pretty sure He’s okay with that, but we’ll get to that.

Thinking About the Spirit

It seems strange to talk about the Holy Spirit having feelings, doesn’t it? I remember encountering this idea in my first year of Bible college. I guess I’d never given it that much thought. Of course, when I thought about it and considered what Scripture has to say, it made perfect sense.

And it’s not like I hadn’t thought about the Holy Spirit much before. I had. In fact, the fact that He didn’t come up much in the sermons and Sunday school discussions of my younger years only served to pique my curiosity. If He actually was a co-equal and co-eternal member of the Trinity, I reasoned, it would make sense that He should be getting more airplay.

Growing up I got the impression that people were



uncomfortable with the One Jesus called “Comforter” (I grew up with the King James Version). When He did come up in conversation the references tended to be oblique and guarded and I sensed a certain hesitance to talk about Him at all.

A Spectrum

Later on, when I heard about the kinds of things that were going on among some of our more “charismatic” brothers and sisters, I began to understand why the tradition I grew up in tended toward a more reserved theology of the Holy Spirit.

And so we have a spectrum. Among some believers there’s a tendency to emphasize certain dramatic aspects of the Holy Spirit’s ministry and among others there’s the reciprocal tendency to react by resisting the thought of a Holy Spirit who sometimes behaves in embarrassing ways.

So there’s a divide. And that’s a shame. And I’m sure it grieves the Holy Spirit to think that He has become the source of disunity.

I’m afraid there’s trouble at either extreme. There’s also the problem of being merely “theological” in our

It seems strange to talk about the Holy Spirit having feelings, doesn’t it?



approach to the Holy Spirit. We can carefully search the Scriptures to assemble a theology of the Holy Spirit, but miss seeing and enjoying the forest for the trees.

It's happened

before. Remember Jesus' rebuke of the scholars in John 5:35—they were searching the Scriptures looking for Life and He was standing right in front of them.

I suspect that the Holy Spirit would rather be known than be known about. I don't suppose He'd be particularly impressed by our ability to list all the gifts and all the fruit of the Spirit if we aren't experiencing His power or His influence in our lives.

Power of the Spirit

Speaking of power, it's natural and reasonable to talk about power when we talk about the Holy Spirit. After all, when Jesus promised his disciples in Acts 1:8 that the Holy Spirit was coming, He also promised them power.

And Paul, too, made a definite connection between the Holy Spirit and power. In Romans 15:19, for example, he says, "By the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit." So it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of power and signs and miracles, and the book of Acts and the writings of Paul give us ample reason to do just that. If the Holy Spirit has power to offer us, who are we to refuse it or even downplay its importance in our lives?

Acts tells us what the Holy Spirit looks like when he moves through and among his people in a context of power and signs and miracles. The gospel of John approaches the subject from a slightly different angle.

In John 14 Jesus promised His disciples another helper, advocate, comforter. This is what He said this about Him: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (v. 26).

His Primary Work

I'm quite convinced that this is the primary work of the Holy Spirit. After all, what could be more important for followers of Jesus than to know Him and understand His Word? And without the Holy Spirit's supernatural work

in their lives that would be an impossibility.

Think of how many times Jesus marveled at His disciples' inability to understand what he was trying to teach them. For example, remember Jesus' words to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25).

Those disciples had the benefit of three years of observing all the miracles and absorbing all the teaching of Jesus, and yet it wasn't until the Holy Spirit came that they finally understood.

So here's my thesis in a nutshell "If we understand anything at all about Jesus and what He came to accomplish on earth, that is our best evidence that the Holy Spirit is active in our lives."

This is the amazing and exciting and humbling truth about the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. His main job is to point us to Jesus.

And that's why I think He's okay with always being listed last. And in this He is our example. He exemplifies the humility of a Jesus-focused life, and He invites us to join Him in pointing others to Jesus.

So Much More

There's so much more that really needs to be said that I haven't even touched on. It seems like a shame not to even mention His groaning on our behalf (Rom. 8:26).

Let me end with this thought. Remember how Jesus described to Nicodemus what it is like when a person has been born of the Spirit? "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

We have this inclination to try to define the Holy Spirit and even, God forbid, contain Him by defining how He may or may not manifest Himself. If the Holy Spirit is indeed a person, then He also has volition and, just like the wind, He cannot be contained or neatly defined or pinned down in the pages of a systematic theology textbook like a dead butterfly. But we can experience His work in our lives, and we must allow Him the freedom to move in us and through us according to His own will.

Dwight Plett has roots in Landmark, grew up northeast of Arden, and has spent most of his adult life north of Riverton, all in Man. He is the son of Art and Margaret Plett, the husband of Lorna, and the father of Caleb and Nathanael. He is a baker, a farmer, and a preacher who is currently on the ministerial team of the Mennville EMC.



Being the Communion of Saints

by Pastor Troy Selley

I grew up reciting the Apostles' Creed every other week until I could say it from memory. Creeds were an integral part of Sunday worship in our small-town Anglican church, even if they were recited in a slow monotone by minister and congregation alike. Whenever we said the words, "I believe in...the communion of saints," I would picture Jesus sitting with his disciples at the Last Supper, and I would think, Absolutely, I believe that happened.

The Early Meaning

This childhood understanding is probably not what the original authors of the Apostles' Creed had in mind, yet it leads us to ask an important question: what does it mean for us to believe in the communion of saints?

Thomas P. Rausch, in his book *I Believe in God*, tells us that the phrase "the communion of saints" was not included in the earliest versions of the creed. It was first found in a commentary written by Nicetas of Remesiana about the turn of the fifth century, where he used the Latin phrase *sanctorum communionem* to describe the fellowship of holy people who have lived across all of time.

A Second Question

This leads us to ask a second question: what does it mean for us to participate in the fellowship of holy people? First, let us define "holy people" or "saints" simply as all who have a saving faith in Jesus Christ. These are the people who make up the Church, the one body of Christ.

Sanctorum communionem can be translated as either "the communion of saints" as it is most widely understood, or as "participation in the holy things." Both translations emphasize an active participation in the fellowship of holy people, which is the Church (both local and global). So what does active participation look like for us in the Church today that remains faithful to our stated belief in the communion of saints?

Defining Communion

Serving as an altar boy was the obvious way for a young boy to participate in the Anglican church. I have fond memories of wearing the heavy wool robes in the sweltering summer heat, proudly knowing the order in which to light the candles, and knowing exactly when to bring the bread, wine, and water to the minister at the altar for the Lord's Supper. I even mowed the grass at the church every summer. By all accounts, I felt like I was a part of the communion in our church.



Unfortunately, what we feel is not always the best indicator of whether or not we are on the right path. The communion of saints demands not just activity, but Spirit-led and Spirit-filled activity.

We may dutifully attend church three out of five Sundays per month, cook a pie for the youth fundraiser, and make a generous donation to the mission trip, making us feel like we are actively participating in the life of the church. Without discounting the value of these activities in their proper context, we must admit that we also have ample opportunity to do similar things as part of other clubs and organizations.

Activities That Set Us Apart

We must dare to dig deeper and ask, what activities set the Church apart from the world? What are the activities that bind us together as a communion of saints across all of time and across the globe in this current day?

Although the Apostles' Creed makes no specific reference to these activities, our faith tradition calls them "ordinances." The ordinances of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and footwashing are foundational to our participation in the holy things. They are the Spirit-led and Spirit-filled activities that bind us all across time and space.

Baptism

I like to think of baptism as our official introduction to the communion of saints, "identifying the believer with the church of Christ," as stated in our Statement of Faith.

Jesus Christ instructed all who would believe in Him to be baptized as a public declaration of our repentance and as a declaration to the world, “I belong to Jesus!”

It is also an invitation to our local fellowship to walk with us on this journey—to teach us, to disciple us, to correct us, and to help us grow in Jesus Christ. In baptism one asks for true communion—authentic fellowship on a level only possible through Jesus Christ—with other Christ-followers.

The Lord’s Supper

The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is a continual reminder that we are all bound together in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though some see the Lord’s Supper primarily as a time for individual reflection and worship, the aspect of fellowship throughout scripture is too strong to ignore.

Jesus expressed his longing to celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples (Luke 22:15) and Paul harshly corrected individuals of the church at Corinth for going ahead and eating the Lord’s Supper without waiting for anyone else (1 Cor. 11:21). Participation in the Lord’s Supper with other believers is active participation in the communion of saints.

Footwashing

Footwashing is perhaps one of the most overlooked activities within the fellowship that can bind us together. In the practice of footwashing, the communion of saints expresses the value of love for one another, and service to one another. To humbly kneel before a brother or sister in Christ and wash their feet is an act unique in its practice and unrivalled in its power to bond us together in the Spirit.

The ordinances are three simple, traditional, and foundational activities that define our participation in the communion of the saints. Beyond these, we can add the long list of activities we carry out in expressing our worship of God, in fulfilling the Great Commission, and in living out the Great Commandment.

Our activities, our methods, and even our specific callings will vary from church to church as we each find our place in God’s plan. Through it all, the ordinances bind us together as one communion of saints.

Experiencing the Communion of Saints

This past Christmas, 28 members from our church had to opportunity to worship with a small, passionate church appropriately named Noah’s Ark, in El Zorrillo, Baja California, Mexico. Our worldly differences were



stark—from opportunity, to income level, to housing and transportation, to the many cultural and language differences. Yet something holy happened when Canadians and Mexicans gathered together before our one and only Lord.

None of our earthly differences mattered, as we came together as a communion of saints. We shared a meal together. We sang worship songs in Spanish and English. We prayed over a very special family. Pastor Angel blessed me with the privilege of preaching God’s Word, and our gifted translator Lorena made sure all

understood. It was a small, yet exhilarating preview of what it will be like when the communion of saints truly comes together as one in eternity.

The communion of saints is unlike any other fellowship, club, group, or organization in the world. This is because the communion of saints is not of this world. It is of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

So bake those pies, serve faithfully on church committees, shake hands, and give hugs freely every Sunday morning; but also engage in the deep riches of authentic communion experienced through the ordinances. Practice the holy things that set the church apart from the world and bond all saints together for eternity.

Troy Selley, MDiv., and his wife Cora-Lee are living by grace as they pastor Oak Bluff Bible Church, in southern Man., and raise their three children.



The communion of saints demands not just activity, but Spirit-led and Spirit-filled activity.

“I Believe in... the Forgiveness of Sins.”

by Dr. Harvey Plett

The Apostolic or Apostles’ Creed is a profound summary of the essence of the Christian faith. It is brief, concise, but does not elaborate the meaning of the various statements.

This statement, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” is, in the estimate of the writer, the essential essence of the Christian faith. Without forgiveness, there is no gospel, no redemption, but only condemnation. Without forgiveness we would not be able to have a relationship with God.

The only way to bring humankind back into relationship with God is forgiveness. Similarly, in order for me to have a relationship with a fellow human who has hurt me I need to forgive that hurt whether that person repents or not though our relationship will not be restored unless the wrongdoer acknowledges his wrong and seeks forgiveness (Mk. 11:25).

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is taking the wrongs done to you, absorbing the consequences, letting them go and not holding them against the perpetrator whether the person repents or not and thus removing my side of the barrier that hinders our relationship.

Jesus came to redeem us. The only way He could do that was by forgiving us. And to forgive us He had to take the consequences of our sins against Him, absorb them, and then let us go free. His death on the cross was His way of forgiving us. He had to experience the separation from God. On the cross He cried out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” Those were the consequences of our sin against God and the cost of forgiveness.

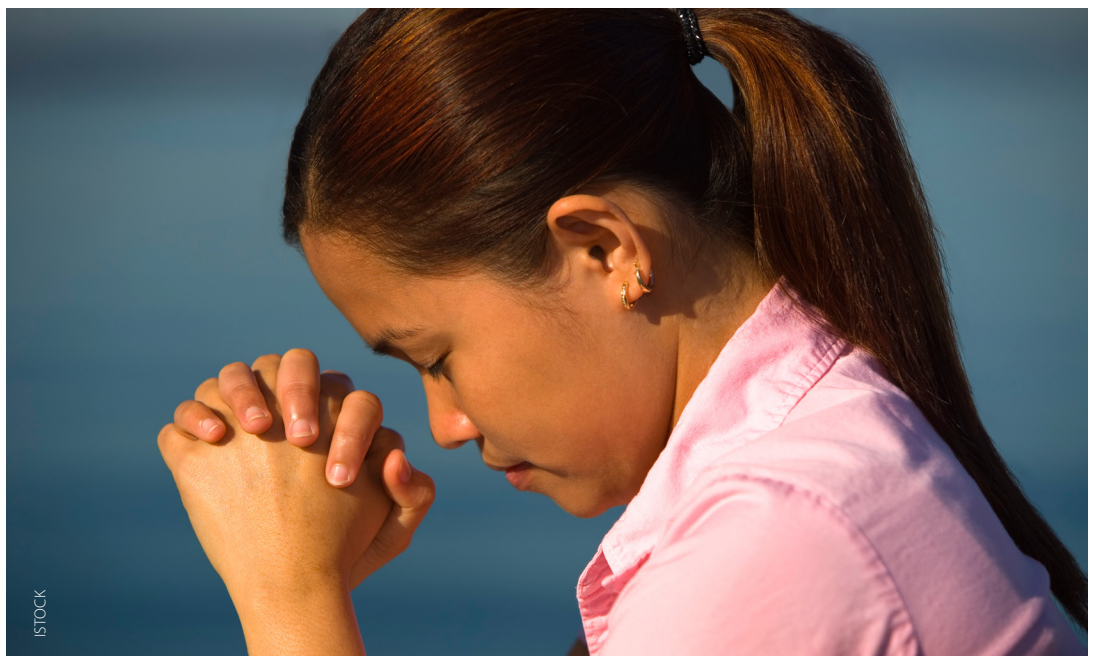
In Ephesians 1:7 we read, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his

grace which he lavished upon us.” And in Colossians 1:13-14 we read, “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Much more could be said but here we have a concise definition of redemption: “the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus’ death on the cross was a voluntary death. He did it because that is the only way forgiveness was possible. All of us were dead in our trespasses and sins. So by His death Jesus wiped out death and brought forgiveness.

Let’s apply it to our life. If you forgive someone who has ruined your reputation, what happens? You accept the ruined reputation and let the one who has done it go free; you do not hold it against him nor do you seek justice. That briefly is what forgiveness is. It is substitutional; the one sinned against absorbs the hurt and pain of the evil done and does not hold it against the guilty party. This is what Jesus did.

The Bible says the soul that sins will die. He has brought forgiveness, but it doesn’t become yours until you accept it. To accept it means you acknowledge you have done wrong, are sorry for it and ask for forgiveness. And then Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. We are then free and in relationship with our Saviour.



What About Repentance?

That is very essential, but not for the forgiver. If the guilty one wishes to experience forgiveness than she or he will have to confess and repent of the wrong done and seek forgiveness. The hurt party forgives whether the guilty party repents or not.

But if the one who is guilty wants to experience forgiveness in his or her life, that person must repent. So the person repents, apologizes and asks forgiveness. The forgiver does what a friend of mine did to a repentant person. He said, "I have forgiven you a long time ago." But you go on to say, "Yes I forgive you gladly. I forgave you already but I am happy you are seeking the forgiveness for yourself."

At that point the final step in forgiveness can happen—reconciliation. The forgiver has already forgiven, but full reconciliation can only happen if the guilty party repents and seeks forgiveness.

What about Restoration?

For example, what happens to what was stolen? The forgiver forgives and does not demand repayment. If the guilty party offers restitution, the forgiver receives it not so much for himself but to help the guilty party find peace and freedom.

Forgiveness and Spiritual Healing

The hurt party forgives, for this is necessary to be healed. If one does not forgive, one will struggle with bitterness, anger, and avoid the wrongdoer. So forgiveness in this sense is therapeutic. It brings healing to your soul and will help one to love the wrongdoer.

The wrongdoer must repent and seek forgiveness to become free and move toward healed relationships. We will not forget some of the serious hurts we forgive, but when the memory comes we decide to not indulge in those memories but set them aside because we have forgiven them.

In forgiveness the wrongdoer and the forgiver each has or her his part. Each can only do his or her part. The forgiver forgives whether that is accepted or not. The sinner repents to experience that forgiveness. Forgiveness is complete when this happens. This is what is modeled by Christ forgiving the repentant sinner. Christ has died for all. Forgiveness is available for all but only those who respond to the offer of forgiveness experience that forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a Decision

You have to decide to forgive just as Jesus decided to forgive our sins and then took the consequences—death. But forgiveness becomes ours only as we acknowledge the wrong we have done, repent, and ask for forgiveness.

Forgiveness is my decision to absorb evil done to me and not hold it against the doer. This gives me peace in

my soul. For the wrongdoer to experience that forgiveness, the wrongdoer must repent, confess and acknowledge the wrong and ask for forgiveness.

This forgiveness now makes it possible for reconciliation between the two. It may take time to move forward for the forgiver as well as it may take time for reconciliation to come to completion.

But forgiveness makes that possible as one commits oneself to walk in forgiveness. This is the will of God. Rejoice in the forgiveness of Jesus and, with the resurrection power that is yours because you have Jesus (Rom. 6; 2 Pet. 1:3), walk in continual forgiveness towards those who do you wrong.

Concluding Observations

Here are some key biblical references that speak to forgiveness: Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12, 14-15; Mk. 11:25; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:12-13. Why not study them personally or in a group.

We are to follow Jesus' example. He forgave our sins through His death before we repented and we experience that forgiveness only if we repent and accept it. You and I are to always forgive the person who does wrong to us whether the other person repents or not. That is loving the other. The one who did the wrong needs to repent if he or she wants to experience forgiveness. When that happens, reconciliation and a renewed relationship become possible and should emerge.

Dr. Harvey Plett has served as president of Steinbach Bible College and as EMC moderator; he is a long-serving minister at Prairie Rose EMC. He continues to do some teaching, preaching, counseling and writing. He and his wife Pearl live in Mitchell, Man., and celebrated 58 years of blessed marriage on August 22, 2016.



Resurrecting Our Belief in the Resurrection of the Body

by Pastor Paul Walker

What happens after you die? We might say, “You go to heaven when you die.” But that leads to other questions.

What is heaven like? There is no shortage of speculations. Some people imagine the Pearly Gates of heaven suspended high in the clouds. Those who are welcomed past the Pearly Gates are treated to bright lights, smooth Jazz, halos, and harps.

Others think of the lyrics of vacating this earth: “To that home on God’s celestial shore. I’ll fly away.” And still others struggle with any sort of vision of life after death.

How will we ever find clarity and understanding? As a starting point, we should resist the urge to say too little and too much about life after death. If we say too little, we risk missing out on the truth; if we say too much, we risk distorting the message of hope.

This is why we need to recapture a fresh vision of what both the Creeds and Scriptures teach us on life after death, and life after life after death. Faithfulness to Scripture and Creed can help us navigate the rough waters of confusion and caricature.

What Do Scripture and Creed Teach Us?

For starters, they teach the resurrection of the dead as the ultimate hope of the Redeemed. Our bodies will be glorified and recreated in the same manner that Jesus’ crucified body rose from the grave on Easter morning. This is not a disembodied soul going to heaven when you die. The resurrection of the body is properly not about life after death, but life after life after death. It is

the promise of New Creation.

Now you might think, “How does that fit in with going to heaven when you die?” Well, while heaven may be a temporary place for the soul, heaven is not the ultimate destiny of the redeemed. As N. T. Wright notes, “Heaven is important, but it is not the end of the world.” Let’s explore this further.

The Nature of Heaven

Heaven was created alongside earth in the beginning (Gen. 1:1) and will be “recreated” alongside the earth for union at the end of the age (Rev. 21-22). An ancient Jewish thinking saw Heaven as a physical place above the earth, and the abode of God. It’s perhaps best to view Heaven as not so much a physical location, but a realm and a dimension that exists both alongside and separate from ours in a mysterious interlocking relationship.


Heaven is a place where believers go in death. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this when he writes “to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), or speaks of his desire to “be with Christ” upon death (Phil. 1:23).

While heaven is the dwelling place for the soul, the weight of Scripture points to an eventual future embodied resurrection of the dead, and not a disembodied existence apart from the earth. Heaven is a temporary resting place for the souls of the saints. Heaven and Earth will one day be joined as one in the culmination of the New Creation. John, the writer of Revelation, describes such a union with his description of the new

Jerusalem descending from heaven to launch the new age (Rev. 21-22).

The Biblical Hope of Resurrection

The resurrection of body does not imply a disembodied soul escaping to heaven for eternity. As N.T. Wright puts it, “Resurrection isn’t a fancy way of saying, ‘going to heaven when you die’.” It is not about the ‘life after death’ as such. Rather, it’s way of talking about being bodily alive again after a period of being bodily dead.



Resources Consulted

Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 2014

Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine through the Apostles’ Creed*, 2016

N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 2008; *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 2006; *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues*, 2014



Resurrection is a second-stage postmortem life: 'life after life after death'.

The Creed says that our bodies will become like Christ's resurrected body. It is a bold reminder that the New Creation that was launched on Easter morning, as Jesus burst forth from the tomb, will no longer be the "not yet" for those who wait upon the Lord. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:21).

The resurrection of the body is God creating for us physical, glorified, and immortal bodies that can participate in the New Creation in which there is no longer any death or decay. This is why the Apostle Paul writes, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). This will take place when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead at the end of this age (Is. 65-66, 1 Thess. 4:16-17, Rev. 20-22).

Does the Resurrection of the Body Matter?

Firstly, it teaches us that God has not given up on the mission of rescue and renewal. The biblical hope boldly proclaims God has been in the process of putting the world to rights, bringing order to chaos, and establishing shalom to our violent disordered world. The

resurrection of the body is God's supreme act of rescue from the curse of death.

Christmas reminds us of this! We are reminded that, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) to rescue and renew us. God assumed the likeness of sinful human nature (Rom. 8:3) in the person of Jesus Christ to heal us of the curse.

As the Christmas carol *Joy to the World* declares, "He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found!" Christmas reminds us that Christ came to overthrow the curse of death by entering our cursedness and overcoming it in the power of resurrection. We who are united with Christ, our rescuer, now await our final rescue through the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Secondly, it reminds that this world matters. Unlike the Gnostic inclination to devalue the material world around us, Christians confess that this is our Father's world. A belief in the resurrection of the body is also a belief in our restored relationship to rightly rule and reign with Christ over God's good creation.

This is why the Apostle Paul so closely connects the liberation of creation to the redemption of the children of God in Romans 8. When humans are put right, all of creation will be put right. God's rescue project is more than just for individuals, but for all of creation.

This has huge implications for how we treat our Father's world today. God's work of New Creation has already been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, and in us through our baptisms. We as Christians ought to begin to live now in this age, the "not yet" promise of the age to come. This should challenge us to adjust our actions and attitudes towards the material world.

Lastly, it is a blessed hope for those whose are grieving the loss of their health. Our current bodies are wasting away, corruptible, and susceptible to disease and destruction. As a pastor I've sat with many people whose bodies were in various stages of giving out on them. The resurrection of the body reminds us that though we may grieve our current bodily failings, our future resurrected bodies will not fail us nor hinder us. Instead, let us look forward to the day where "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Thanks be to God! Maranatha!

Paul Walker is blessed to serve Roseisle EMC as their pastor. He is a graduate of Horizon College and Seminary, a father of two, and a husband of but one wife. Nothing excites Paul more than helping people discover Jesus in thought, word, and deed. Paul also has interests that include theology, travel, philosophy, art, music, history, good food, and all things that cause wonder and awe.



The Apostles' Creed: Life Everlasting

by Pastor David Thiessen

“I believe . . . in life everlasting.” The present Christian Church is waiting for the realization of our future hope, or are we?

The book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament Scriptures encourages us to be a people who wait. In Hab. 2:3 it says, “For the revelation waits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”

I believe the Lord is speaking to Habakkuk about “life everlasting.” It is arriving, but it has not arrived yet! So we wait.

How do we speak of something that is not here yet? Perhaps little, and certainly not in terms of rigid dogma. We should think and speak with some caution, seeking to keep an open mind. We need to continue a careful reading of Scripture and not jump to quick conclusions—especially since the conclusion is not here yet!

But “life everlasting” has begun. We speak of it in the words of George Eldon Ladd as “inaugurated eschatology.” However, what we have so far is only the beginning, as important as that is (Luke 4:16-21).

I want to write about this eternal life in terms of New Testament teaching on a new heaven and a new earth. I will make reference to a number of texts and make comments on each one.

I also want to acknowledge the writings of N. T. Wright and J. Richard Middleton. They have been instrumental in awaking in me the anticipation of “life everlasting.”

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”



He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

This passage speaks about what is known as the final state. The disappearance of the sea suggests the removal of evil and its influence. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, is the post-resurrection Church, the bride of Christ, coming down out of heaven to the earth.

God himself will be with the people. Death, mourning, tears, and pain have passed away, along with the old order of things. Everything is being made new.

Acts 3:19-21

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

Here is Peter, shortly after Pentecost, preaching the good news of Jesus. The recently ascended Christ must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything. Here, “life everlasting” is about the restoration of “everything.”

Ephesians 1:9-10

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Here in this amazing salvation text, beginning in verse three, Paul says some of the most startling

words in the New Testament. God will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ! Salvation involves the task of unifying everything that has been fragmented or alienated, thereby bringing oneness and wholeness and healing! How comprehensive is that?!

This is the nature of “life everlasting.”

Colossians 1:19-20

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Paul does not limit the efficacy of Christ’s atonement to humanity. It speaks of peacemaking and reconciliation as all inclusive as possible in heaven and on earth!

2 Peter 3:10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The text has the language of judgment and fire. But notice “the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” It seems the fire will have a cleansing or purifying purpose. This suggests that the new heaven and new earth refer to renewal and restoration, rather than replacement and starting again from scratch. I think the language of destruction does not apply to the creation, but to the judgment of sin.

Romans 8:19-23

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Here we have the imagery of labour pains in childbirth and the imagery of the Israelites groaning in the slavery under Pharaoh. These images are applied to the human condition, but moving well beyond that to the entire created order.



This is creation itself experiencing the liberation and freedom from the bondage brought on by the sin and rebellion of sinful humanity. It’s another salvation story of God, repairing what was broken in all creation, along with the redemption of the children of God.

Since the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2, followed by the heartbreaking results of human sin and autonomy in chapters 3 and following, it has always been God’s intention, motivated by His matchless love and mercy, to see heaven and earth come together, so that God’s will would be done on earth as it is in heaven! This is the Kingdom of God that Jesus announced at His first coming and it will be fulfilled and completed when He returns!

Then we can joyfully and gratefully repeat the words spoken at creation: “It is good; it is very good!”

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

David Thiessen (BA, BTh, MCS) has done a lifetime of pastoral ministry together with his wife Merna. He served as the EMC Conference Pastor from 2000 to 2011. While he is toying with retirement, he is currently the part-time interim pastor at Mennville EMC in Manitoba’s Interlake.



Using the Apostles' Creed in Worship

by Kimberly Muehling and Paul Walker

For the past year the EMC community has gathered through *The Messenger* to think about the Apostles' Creed—a great time of grounding ourselves in the core beliefs of the Christian faith. Now, how can we use the Apostles' Creed as a resource for our churches and apply it in our individual lives?

We need to do the hard work of applying what we learn to our lives. As James reminds us, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

In this article you will hopefully find both inspiring and useful ideas, but this is by no means an exhaustive list. Let us all know what you are doing in your churches!

Ideas for the Worship Service

Spoken Confession

Consider adding a congregational confession of the Apostles' Creed to your worship service. Historically, many Christian churches have recited the Apostles' Creed as a regular part of the weekly worship service. Other churches confess the Apostles' Creed monthly, quarterly, or during a special service. We recommend finding a practice that works best for your local context.

Recitation during a service can be an effective way to notice the many different voices in your congregation. Instead of always reciting the Apostles' Creed together, ask an individual, family, or group to recite it for the rest of the congregation. If you have multiple languages in your church, this would be a great time to hear them. Ask a child or a senior to share.

In Song

Another way of incorporating the Creed into a worship service is to sing it. There are a few versions of the Creed put to music such as *This I believe (The Creed)* by Hillsong and *We Believe* by the Newsboys. There are a plethora of songs that encompass the various aspects of the Creed. A service could be divided into sections, each with part of the creed recited and then sung. Alternatively, an entire series of services could be devoted to the Creed, each Sunday focusing on a section.

In Prayer

The Apostles' Creed lends itself naturally to corporate prayer. As confessional prayer: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty. Father, we confess that we are disobedient children. Help us to trust You and lean on Your everlasting arms.” Or pastoral prayer: “Come again to judge the living and the dead. God, we pray that people would come to know You. We believe in



the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints. Father, we pray for the global church....” Silence and reflection between the Creed and corresponding prayer would be particularly useful.

Ideas for Church Life

Sermon Series/ Curriculum

The earliest Anabaptists would frequently structure their teachings and discipleship efforts around the Apostles' Creed. The Creed expressed and represented the essence of Christian faith and doctrine. It was not uncommon for many early Anabaptists to memorize the Apostles' Creed by heart.

What if we returned to our historic roots and began to use the Apostles' Creed as a resource once again for our churches? Pastors, are you looking for sermon material? Consider using the Apostles' Creed for your next sermon series! It is a great resource for laying out the story, unity, coherence, and major themes of the Christian faith.

Sunday School teachers, why not spend twelve weeks unpacking each section of the Creed? A great resource for commentary would be our recent *Messenger* series. The magazine's articles could be read out loud and then discussed in small groups in an older classroom setting.

Is your church planning a retreat weekend? The Apostles' Creed could be a great resource for a weekend of study and reflection.

Art/ Prayer Room

Do you have a talented artist in your midst? Ask them to create a series of works (be it paintings, dance, song) around the Creed to share with the congregation in a service, around the church building, or on a special evening or weekend.

Art inspired by one or various sections of the Creed could be used in a prayer room to create stations for

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. 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, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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.

when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deut.11:18-20).

Even now, Christians in many parts of the world where the Bible is restricted still rely on memorizing

specific contemplation and worship. This is a great way to again encourage your less vocal congregants to get involved and share their gifts with the wider church body.

Teach the Children

Few things are as silly and delightful in church as children's worship time. Teaching the Creed to our children is important in so many ways. Sunday School fills their heads with stories, but rarely are they taught the foundational truths of our faith in clear language. Speak it together, but also explain what it is we are saying.

Teach your older elementary and teens the theological terms (i.e., theories of atonement) so that they can enjoy sounding impressive! We do not have a catechism, but the Creed can function in a similar way and help children to understand what we agree about amidst all that we so enjoy debating.

Make it fun! Who knew the Creed could be a rap? Or recited in a variety of silly voices? Have the children create art or skits to share with the congregation. It is so important that our children contribute to our regular church life.

Individual Walk

Bible Study

Putting the articles from the last year away; write your own. This could be done individually or in a small Bible study setting. Grab your Bible, a handy concordance (there are lots online), and get to work! What passages of Scripture back up the various parts of the Creed? What does God show us about Himself in these passages? “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col. 3:16).

Memorization

God commanded the ancient Israelites to plant the Torah in both their hearts and their minds. “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them

great swaths of Scripture. Here in the West, we can pull up BibleGateway or grab Strong's Concordance anytime we are looking for a verse, but that does not help God's words to grow and bloom in our hearts.

While the Creed is not Scripture, it is useful to memorize as a guide to the Scriptures. Go further and memorize verses to correspond to each section of the Creed. If we are to be deeply rooted, we must put the words of God and the tenets of our faith not only on our laptops, but also in our hearts.

Closing Thoughts

The Apostles' Creed is perfectly designed for use in a congregational worship setting. The early church would often confess the Apostles' Creed together before receiving communion, administering baptism, or as a public act of worship. This helped the church articulate and confess the faith once delivered.

To confess the Creed together with fellow believers is more than just mindlessly reciting a list of dusty facts. It becomes an act of worship when it is connected to loving God with our heart, soul, mind, strength, and loving our neighbours as ourselves. A worshipful use of the Creed should connect to the deepest part of our being and the heart of the Almighty God.

We, as the Worship Committee of the EMC, pray that the Apostles' Creed will become a great resource to help enrich your local church in the years to come!

Kimberly Muehling (Fort Garry) and Pastor Paul Walker (Roseisle) serve on the EMC Worship Committee under the authority of the Board of Church Ministries. Jessica Wichers (EFC Steinbach) is the committee's third member.



Dissecting ‘catholic’ in the Apostles’ Creed

by Kimberly Muehling, Paul Walker, and Jessica Wichers

In the Apostles’ Creed, we agree that we belong to the “holy catholic” church. What does this mean? Are we saying that we are part of the Roman Catholic Church? What does “catholic” mean anyways? Let’s unpack the grammar first.

Written in Latin *sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam*, “holy” and “catholic” are adjectives (descriptive). Church is the noun (the thing). So, the church is holy: devoted to the service of God and morally and spiritually excellent, and catholic: including a wide variety of things; all-embracing (see Oxford Living Dictionary).

The exact origin of the Apostles Creed has been rather lost to the haze of history. By the 9th century AD, when Charlemagne imposed the version we use today, it was already accepted throughout Christendom. The earlier (AD 381) version of the Nicene Creed uses the phrase “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” As there was only a loose conglomeration of churches at the time, many with differing theology, the council of Nicaea could only have meant the universal church.

Even Martin Luther spoke of and to the church as one general group as he experienced it. While he directed criticism to the Pope and traditional practices, the church was simply the general population. Theological barriers have since gone up on all sides and we now identify ourselves as members of specific church groups, but it is important to recognize that we are still one (albeit messy and often dysfunctional) family in Christ. Karl Barth explains, “The church is universal because it is not limited by any barrier, either of state or of race or of culture” (*The Faith of the Church*, Wipf and Stock, rep. 2006, 117).

So, reading “holy” and “catholic” as adjectives is very different from agreeing to believe in the Catholic Church. If you capitalize the words, you are implying a proper noun, which would mean the actual organisation known as the Roman Catholic Church.

Interestingly, within the Roman Catholic Catechism both the adjective and the proper noun are employed. In direct discussion about the Apostles’ Creed, they use the adjective. However, later in the additions from the Second Vatican Council they use the proper noun (Catechism, 1993, see sections 750, 816-819). This change came about gradually as part of the Counter-Reformation.

As the use of catholic is not common in everyday language, some churches have moved to the use of other



synonyms in its place, such as global, universal, or diverse. The current Lutheran Service Book uses “holy Christian Church.” While in *Living in God’s Kingdom* uses “holy catholic church,” EMC churches are free to use different phrasing at their own discretion. After all, we are all translating.

So, however we use the Apostles’ Creed, with our handy lowercase letters, we can freely and confidently agree to participating in the holy catholic church alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ “from every nation, and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9 NRSV).

Kimberly Muehling (Fort Garry), Pastor Paul Walker (Roseisle), and Jessica Wichers (EFC Steinbach) serve on the EMC Worship Committee under the authority of the Board of Church Ministries. See the Worship Committee’s article Using the Apostles’ Creed in Worship (Jan. 2017).



The Apostles' Creed and EMC churches

by Terry M. Smith

How is the Apostles' Creed used in your church? Most EMC churches do not use it. Some might say they are not credal and focus more on lifestyle than on doctrine. They might say the creed has been used for legal enforcement, includes the word Catholic, and does not mention Jesus' life or teaching.

Yet Menno Simons in 1554 referred to "The Twelve Articles." He replied to a Reformed leader, "I trust that we who are grains of one loaf agree not only to the twelve articles (as he counts them), but also as to all the articles of the Scriptures." Menno had been a priest, so it once was a regular part of his confession, and he says he and other Anabaptists still believe it.

Balthasar Hubmaier, also a former priest, used it in his 1527 order of service for Anabaptist baptism at Nicolsburg. Prior to their baptism, much of the first part of what he asked candidates centred on the Apostles' Creed.

Peter Riedemann, the early Hutterian leader, used the creed as a structure for his Confession of Faith (ca. 1540-45) to explain Anabaptist beliefs to Philip of Hesse, and the Swiss Brethren of Hesse used the creed in dialogue with Reformed leaders in 1578.

The Latin word *credo* means, "I believe." Does our common use of the word confession mean anything different?

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He 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,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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.



Some say a creed is enforced, while a confession is voluntary. Yet even in the EMC there are limits. Our Constitution says a minister can be disciplined for unsound doctrine (p. 19).

The use of Catholic predates the AD 1054 separation of the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman) churches. Whatever Catholic means, it does not mean Roman Catholic.

Were early Anabaptists more focused on lifestyle than doctrine? They came from a credal background and affirmed classical doctrines. They knew that they were being examined doctrinally and used the creed to show their orthodoxy, but it is important to recognize that they could do this because there was common ground.

Anabaptist theologian J. C. Wenger says, "On the major doctrines of the Christian faith, as found in the so-called Apostles' Creed, for example, there was no significant difference between the Anabaptists and the larger bodies of Christendom."

Early Anabaptists did not dismiss the need for correct teaching. Menno Simons often wrote to correct wrong teaching that led to wrong living. If we minimize the need for correct doctrine, we misuse part of our early Anabaptist background.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists knew the weakness of the times: people could memorize a catechism without taking it to heart and remain careless about lifestyle. Felix Manz, Obbe Philips, and Dirk Philips—all early Anabaptist leaders—were the illegitimate sons of Roman Catholic priests. As a result, when early Anabaptists explored the creed, they brought out its ethical implications.

Does the creed skip over Jesus' life, work, and teaching? To say yes is an over-statement. Jesus' influence upon the Apostles' Creed is revealed by looking closely at many of its parts.

The Apostles' Creed and Jesus

by Terry M. Smith

Paul M. Lederach, a Mennonite pastor, says that Anabaptists do “not deny the truth of the creed. It simply does not go far enough! Why? Between ‘born of the Virgin Mary’ and ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’ the *life, work, and teachings of Jesus are ignored!*” (*A Third Way*, Herald Press, 1980, 19, his emphasis). Some Anabaptist leaders repeat his statement as if it were self-evident.

To be fair, though, the Creed needs to be evaluated by its intention. In the second to fifth centuries, and even later, the Church was reading Scripture and bringing out the implications of what it said about God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity. The Creed was developed in a time of controversy and we are indebted to the insights of major church councils.

Why is it important to know about Jesus’ life or his teachings? Why do we follow Jesus in life? In the end, it is because of who he is.

Jesus is God with us (Matt. 1:23), the fullness of God in flesh (Col. 1:19-20; 2:9). The Creed says, “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”

Does the Creed skip over our Lord’s “life, work, and teachings”? It’s accurate to say that the Apostles’ Creed does not mention a parable or describe a healing by Jesus. However, the impact of Jesus can be found in many of its articles.

- “I believe in God the Father.” Who taught us that God is our Father? Jesus did in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9). Jesus shows us the Father and gives us access to him (John 1:1, 14, 18; 4:12; 14:6). Because of Jesus, we call God “our Father.”



- “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” It was Jesus who said he would send the Holy Spirit (John 14:17). Because of Jesus, the Spirit has come.
- “I believe in the Church.” Didn’t Jesus say he would build the Church (Matthew 16:18)? Because of Jesus, the Church started.
- “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” What we say or teach about forgiveness of sins is rooted in the person and work of Jesus who “was crucified” (Mark 2:1-12).
- “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” Jesus rebuked disbelieving Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the body (Mark 12:24-27), and his own resurrection is a major part of the Christian Church’s proclamation (1 Cor. 15:1-6).
- “I believe in the life everlasting” (John 3:16, 14:1-4). Where is eternal life found? It is found in Christ our Lord (1 John 5:11).

When read this way the Creed centres on the “life, work, and teachings” of Jesus. In any case, can it be fairly said that these are “ignored”? The Church, who wrote the Creed, had faithfully caught what Jesus lived, achieved, and taught.

Upon closer examination, Lederach’s line needs to be revised or, better, dropped. We can teach the Apostles’ Creed with integrity while dealing fairly with broader concerns raised within Anabaptist history.

Why is it important to know about Jesus’ life or his teachings?



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