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 February 26, 2017
 Apostle's Creed Series #1

I Believe in God ...
Psalm 8

Psalm 8:

0 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Today starts a sermon series on the Apostle's Creed.

This week we begin with the very first phrase:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

It begs the question:

What do you believe about God?

Why do you believe that God exists?

It's an important question because we live in a world of increasing ***atheism, or practical atheism.***

Famous scientists like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens all suggest that religion does nothing but harm civilization. God does not exist.

Of course, ***not all scientists*** have had a problem with science and religion. Did you know that George Lamaitre was a Catholic priest, a cosmological physicist and the author of the Big Bang theory? His theory opened the door to reconcile faith and science.

Over the centuries people like Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, and Galileo held their Christian beliefs, and their scientific understanding of the world together. Hamilton, Adam. Creed. Abingdon: Nashville, 2016.

Many people today who deny the existence of God do so based on the ***evil and harm*** that is perpetrated in the name of God. Their frustration is understandable. People of all religions have done terrible things in the name of God.

But there is another rising problem today, that some call ***practical atheism***. These are people who believe in God up here (head), but live as if there is no God, no God of justice, love, mercy, redemption. It's like an extreme individualism or humanistic view of the world. It says that the world revolves around me, and what I want. As believers, we'd just call this what it is: sinfulness, and pride.

Christians espouse a different view. ***We believe*** in the one, true, living God, who was revealed in Jesus Christ. We believe that life does not revolve around us, but rather our Savior Jesus. We should not say we are Christians and then live as if that belief doesn't affect every single thing we say and do!

As Christians our essential ***beliefs shape our everyday lives***. Have you ever thought about what those beliefs are for you? If you had to ***summarize*** your faith in God, what would you say?

For many people, myself included, I would want to use some words of the ***Apostle's Creed***. The creed was written to describe the essential beliefs of the early church.

Legend has it that the Apostle's Creed began with the ***apostle's words***,

at the time of Pentecost.

Although we are pretty sure the Creed came much later, it does reflect the beliefs of the first century church, and it's **structure** is based on Jesus' command in Matthew 28, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The creed is built around the Trinity.

Most Christians in the early church were not literate, so **reciting things** like the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments were ways to preserve the essential tenets of the faith, and pass down those beliefs to other generations.

The PCUSA's **Book of Confessions** includes the Apostle's Creed, and other confessions, from the earliest days of the church to modern times. Many of them were written in response to cultural issues, or heresies within the church.

The Apostle's Creed may have been **written in response** to an early church heresy by **Marcion**, a Christian living in Rome in the second century. He believed that the Old Testament was about a vengeful God, and a flawed creation, and the New Testament was about Jesus, and a God of love.

For him, the **Old Testament was not scripture**, and Jesus was not the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The only 'true scripture' for Marcion was the Gospel of Luke (minus those parts pointing back to the Old Testament), and the letters of Paul that were not specifically Jewish. Unfortunately, many people believed this heresy, and I'd argue that some Christians today tend toward this bias against the God of the Old Testament.

Around A.D. 180, Roman Christians developed an early form of the Apostles' Creed to refute Marcion. It was also called the Roman Creed. They affirmed that the God of creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. They also affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit, the church, and the resurrection of the body.

Candidates for membership in the church went through a long period of instruction, and were asked at their baptism to state what they believed. Their response was the Apostle's Creed.

The Apostles' Creed **continued to evolve** over the centuries. In response to the question of readmitting those who had denied the faith during the persecutions of the second and third centuries, the church added, "**I believe in the forgiveness of sins.**"

In the fourth and fifth centuries, North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of the heroic few or an inclusive church of all who confessed Jesus Christ, leading to the addition of "**holy**" (belonging to God) and "**catholic**" (universal). In Gaul, in the fifth century, the phrase "**he descended into hell**" came into the creed. **By the eighth century**, the creed had attained its present form. The Book of Confessions, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA, pg. 6.

The creed our church recites in worship is the **traditional English version**, while some denominations have a modern version with slight differences, like dead, not hell, seated not sitteth, living not quick....

Regardless of the version, the whole creed begins with two very important words: **I believe.**

What we believe matters.

While some beliefs are just a matter of preference, our **core beliefs** shape who we are, and what we do with our lives. It is often pivotal life experiences that shape our beliefs.

These core beliefs **can lead us** to sacrificial service of others, to give up our lives for another, to work tirelessly for a great mission. They can also lead us to do great harm. One set of beliefs shapes the KKK, another shapes Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity.

Because beliefs have such power, the **early church wanted to record the essential beliefs** for all who followed Jesus Christ.

We use it in worship so often because it is the basics of Christian faith.

This Creed can and should shape our lives and worship, even when we don't use it in worship.

The Creed begins with ***I believe in God.***

Why?

Why do you believe in God?

For many of us, this kind of belief happens when we look around at the ***Creation***, and we see the ***evidence of God.***

Think about Psalm 8—O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Have you ever been ***overwhelmed by the glory*** of God?

Have you ever ***felt small*** in the vastness of creation?

When and where was the last time you saw the ***evidence of God?***

I remember being in my high school youth group, and we went outside at night and all laid down on a tarp and just looked into the starry sky.

It was amazing to consider that the God who made all that, had made me, the God who created this awe-inspiring world, cared for me.

We often call these things ***God-sightings***—what was ***your*** last God-sighting?

For many people it's not just the glory of creation, it's also the wonderful ***God-incidences.***

We could call these coincidences,

but you know what I mean when I say that for us who believe in God, there are no coincidences, only God-incidences, right?

It happens ***so often I lose track*** of them—just this past week it seemed like so many things just fell together for the success of the youth café, little things that I know God was orchestrating,

Another reason we believe in God is ***because Jesus believed*** in God, and taught us to do the same.

Have you ever believed something,
because someone you respected believed it?

Most of us have.

And for most of us, Jesus is the person we most respect.

And he believed in God, so we believe.

The creed continues with ***I believe in God, the Father Almighty.***

God is the ultimate Father.

Why would we call God Father?

Well, the most simple reason is because Jesus called God Father, Abba, and he taught us to do the same in the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus' relationship to God was personal, not abstract,

and ***Father*** was a term of endearment and respect,

a description of an intimate relationship, not a cold and distant connection.

We call God Father because all ***throughout scripture*** God is referred to as a Father of Israel (Duet 1:31, Jerem 31:9, Hosea 11:1-4),

and as a Father to the fatherless, and a father of compassion in the Psalms.

So what about people for whom the term Father God is strange, or hurtful—maybe they had such a horrible earthly Father that they have a hard time calling God ***Father***? What about the fact that God is beyond male/female?

Well, we also know that scripture has ***many names for God***,

and that God is divine, and beyond male or female.

God is also known as a ***mother*** (Duet 32:18, Isaiah 42:14, 49:15, 66:13),

a ***bird*** (Duet 32:11, Ps 57 and 91, Luke 13:34)

a ***rock*** (2 Sam 23:3, Isaiah 44:8, and many Psalms),

a ***tower*** (Ps 61:3, Prov 18:10),

and ***many more images*** that describe who God is and what God does in the world.

We can't determine our names for God based on humans we know—it must be the other way around.

We don't judge God based on human relationships,

instead we measure our human relationships

by how they measure up to God.

And getting rid of the term ***Father*** for God would be taking away a fundamental teaching of Jesus,

and an aspect of the Trinity as old as the church. Instead ***we use it, respect it, and we seek to use a variety*** of names and attributes of God in our worship and study, and not limit our idea of God to just Father.

The creed continues,

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

We believe in a Creator God, the one who made all that is.

The book of Genesis recounts this Creation of all that exists in the heavens and on earth.

Psalm 8 praises the Creator God:

3 *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;*

4 *what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

5 *Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.*

6 *You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,*

7 *all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,*

8 *the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

Psalm 19 is also a hymn of praise to the Creator God.

It's one of my favorite Psalms:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;

and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

2 *Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.*

3 *There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;*

4 *yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,*

I think we've all seen ***evidence of a Creator*** in this amazing world of ours, haven't we?

You look around at the world, the beauty of nature,

the organization of creation, the intricacy of human life—

and you think, there has to be a Supreme being behind all of this, right?

Again we come back to Psalm 8 or 19:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

The heavens are telling the glory of God;

and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

I can't imagine how creation could have organized itself!

In his book, *Creed*, Pastor Adam Hamilton suggests this analogy when we try to decide whether the world just happened, or there was an intelligent Creator behind it all. He says thinking that it all just happened is kind of like trying to see what it would take for cocoa, eggs, flour, sugar and oil to assemble themselves into a three-layer chocolate cake!

We could wait billions of years, and still no cake, right? Hamilton, Adam. *Creed*. Abingdon: Nashville, 2016, pg. 25.

For Christians, God is the ***Creator and organizing force*** of all the universe, the heavens and the earth.

And that belief encourages us to live in ***humility***, because we are pretty small compared to the universe.

It also encourages us to live ***responsibly***, because God has made us a little lower than the angels, and given us dominion over the earth, as we heard in Psalm 8. God has given us the responsibility to be good caretakers and stewards of creation.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

That belief changes who we are, and what we do.

We have a God who is in ***personal relationship*** with us, and yet is the ***Creator*** of the universe!

May God guide us to ***honor and glorify*** our ***Father*** God, and humbly and responsibly serve our ***Creator***.

Amen.

I've put a piece of paper in your bulletin, and I ask that you write on the back any question, or part of the Creed that confuses you, or that you'd like to know more about as we go through it, and you can drop that in the offering plate. The Apostle's Creed can be found on that paper, and we will now stand and recite it together.