

A Shared History – The Apostle’s Creed & Luther

Slide: Apostle’s Creed

What do the following statements have in common?

- "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Corinthians 8:6).
- "Jesus himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." (Colossians 1:17-18)
- "Be of the same mind of Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." (Philippians 2:7-8)

At first appearance, one might simply say that what they have in common is that they are all in the Bible, and that’s true. But what they also have in common is that they are statements of belief. From the earliest times of the people of Israel to now, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we continue to have these statements of belief interpreted, taught, and reinterpreted for the modern church. Today, we call these statements **creeds**. But, what makes these statements different than the following statements:

- Lemon drops are better than Mike & Ikes
- Starbucks coffee is the only coffee to drink. Everything else is second best.
- Liberals only care about the environment.
- Conservatives don’t care about people.

For all intents and purposes, you might say that those are statements of beliefs by some people. For instance, I believe that people should use their turn signals, but is that a Creed? Well, no. Our opinions, and even many of

our beliefs, some of which may or may not be true, do not make a Creed. So, what is it? And, why the Apostle's Creed?

Slide: Luther Rose

As I teach the 8th graders in Confirmation, the difference between the Apostle's Creed and my own version of what I believe God is and does is that it is a group's confession, or rather the whole Christian Church's statement of shared belief about who God is and how God acts in the world. In a creed, a tradition or community of believers says, "This is what we teach." At different times, different aspects of a creed may be more important to us than other parts and in fact, you may not agree with all of what the Creeds say. Our doubts, certainties, or questions about the meaning of particular phrases may vary. But, the Apostle's Creed and also the Nicene Creed stay the same over the centuries because it continues to hold our teachings together like glue. It reminds us that the whole people of God confess something together about who God is. Even on days where we aren't sure we believe it at all, the actual confessing of it may work upon us and the people next to us. It is a shared experience.

So, for over 1500 years, we have confessed this Apostle's Creed, not only because it stands the test of time along with the Biblical witness, but the saints who have all gone before us have confessed it, taught it, and passed it down to us, whether you believe it exactly as it's written or not. It continues to hold the community of faith together and that is why we confess it often in our shared worship.

This Lent, we continue to delve a little bit deeper in this Jubilee year of the Reformation by looking at our very own Martin Luther's Small Catechism. In his jewel of a booklet of teachings, Luther tries to help us see the value of the Creed by stating that the Creed answers some very important questions:

- What kind of God do we have and what can we expect from God?

As Pastor Nate mentioned last week, the Ten Commandments tells us what God expects of us, but the Creed gives us a hint at what we can expect of God and in what way God acts in the world. Before Luther, the Creed was viewed and was taught by carving it and explaining it in ten

little pieces, why I don't know because the Creed naturally divides into three natural sections. But, Luther, in his Small Catechism, stresses the Baptismal connection and his teachings thereof of those three sections by separating the Creed in the following way:

Slide: On Creation, On Redemption, On Being Made Holy

1. **The First Part: On Creation** - God is the God who has created me, you, all that is ours, and the universe.
2. **The Second Part: On Redemption** - God redeems us as the person of Jesus Christ, who came to live with us, die for us, and raise again so that we may know God's abundant love and forgiveness.
3. **The Third Part: On Being Made Holy** - God makes us holy not by our own merit or belief, but through the gift of God's Holy Spirit, given to us to gather us, enlighten us, and be a gift to others and the world God made.

Luther's three part explanation of the Creed is meant to help us see the importance of confessing it and knowing why we do, so that ultimately, we can trust the Biblical witness of all the saints who have gone before us. He then ends his little teaching with the words we all know and love: *This is most certainly true.*

And yet, my continuing in the tradition to teach the Creed and to confess it ultimately does not come down to a theological or historical imperative for me. It does for some and maybe for you. And, perhaps as a pastor of the Lutheran Church, it should, but it doesn't. For me, the Creed is relational. It connects me to the Holy Trinity. It connects me to you. It connects me to my Dad who confessed it when he was alive. It connects me to the Apostles and to those living and now dead. And, it connects me to our neighbors at IC, who although we are not yet celebrating communion with each other, still confess this Creed together because we are of one baptism. And, when asking friends on Facebook this week why they still love the Creed, I heard some similar leanings. Here is what a few friends said:

Slide: Facebook Sermon Fodder!

"I personally like to verbally state my beliefs out loud. It helps me to make the connection with my community at church."

“It grounds me. With all the social chatter and opinions we hear, the creed brings me back to the basics. It reconnects me with the dear saints who have gone before me.”

“It reminds us of all that God has done, and continues to do... for us!”

“For me the creed is a connecting thing with the global church, and with our brothers and sisters who have gone on before us in the faith.”

“It connects us with a global community and is powerful to know that we confess our common faith together with brothers and sisters around the world.”

I'd like to add to these comments by referring to another comment by author Kathleen Norris, who wrote the following in her book, “Embracing a Life of Meaning”:

“There are some people who won't recite the creed. It bugs them too much. I was there once. I really hated it. I didn't know what it was all about. But, after being in church a while, I did think, this is the family story. It's a story you might tell at a family reunion. Of course, there's all this theological history with it. But, it's our story. It's the story the church has decided to tell for 2,000 years. It's not just my story. It's our story.”

Slide: Luther Rose

The Apostle's Creed: It's a good idea still today. It's the glue that binds our storybook together. And, as Luther himself stated about the Creed:

“I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in one common, true faith.”

This is most certainly true.

Amen.