

## **"I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS..."**

Apostles' Creed Sermon Series  
A Sermon by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

Psalm 103:9-12

Matthew 1:20b-21, 6:14-15, Romans 3:21-25a

February 8, 2026

We began this Apostles' Creed sermon series by declaring our belief in "*God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*" To believe and trust in a creative, intelligent, powerful, relational and loving God who created the entire universe as well as each one of us allows us to live each day with a sense of gratitude, peace, hope and purpose. We then declared our belief in "*Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord...*" In Jesus, God put on flesh, and by doing that we saw more clearly God's heart for those who are lost, hurting, sick, poor and oppressed. In Jesus, we saw the depth of God's love and the costliness of grace, as well as God's triumphant power over evil, sin and death. To believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord is to model our lives after his example. Two weeks ago, we declared our belief in "*the Holy Spirit.*" To believe in the Holy Spirit is to know God's imminent presence – a presence that comes alongside us and is at work within us to empower, guide and shape us. It's the Spirit who helps us pray, urges us to be more like Jesus, and compels us to take steps in that direction.

After firmly establishing our believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, last Sunday, we declared our belief in "*the holy catholic Church and the Communion of Saints...*" To say the church is "holy" means that it "belongs to God;" it is "set apart for God." The church is not and never will be holy because of us, only because of God. To say the church is "catholic" with a small "c" is to say it is "everywhere" and "all around." The term emphasizes the unity we share in Christ no matter the church name or location. Some of the biblical words used to describe the church are "family," "fellowship," and "body of Christ." But because the church is made up of imperfect people, we do not always get these things right all the time. But those churches getting it right are made up of people who accept that Jesus is calling them to go the extra mile, to roll up their sleeves to serve others, and to go out of their way to encourage and support one another.

Today, the Apostles' Creed has us declaring our belief in "*the forgiveness of sins.*" There are those who seem to think that the church is all about a guilt trip, about telling you how bad you are. It's true that there are churches whose primary focus seems to be sin and whose weekly worship services are filled with guilt. It's also true that some of the loudest and most vocal Christian voices in our country are often preoccupied with pointing out the sins of others. But I want to point out that such emphasis does not reflect the Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles' Creed. Did you notice that the Creed doesn't say, "I believe that human beings are sinners," though that fact is assumed. It says instead, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." "*The emphasis in both the Creed and the Christian faith is not on guilt, but grace; it is not on sin, but forgiveness*" (Hamilton, pg. 130, Creed).

However, our belief in the forgiveness of sins doesn't mean much if we don't understand that we need forgiveness. If we don't understand that we have a problem with sin, then we are not likely to avail ourselves of its solution. If you and

"sins of omission." Either way, sin is a failure to be or to do what God intends for us as human beings.

Paul expressed the truth about our human condition when he said, "*All have sinned and fall short of God's glory*" (Romans 3:23). Paul said this as one who was aware of his own sinfulness. Throughout his writings, he openly admitted to his past sins as well as his continued struggle with sin. One of our human problems when it comes to confessing our sins is that we too often focus on and point out the sins of others while overlooking our own sins. But honestly, we have all treated others poorly at times; we have gossiped and engaged in "back-biting;" we have been self-absorbed and focused too much on money and possessions; we have failed to do justice and practice loving-kindness. Our sinful failures have resulted in brokenness and alienation in our families, among our friends, in our communities and in our world. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Perhaps somewhere along the way you have heard of the "Seven Deadly Sins" which are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, anger, envy, and pride. That list was established in the fourth century. Of those sins, "pride" is considered to be the most dangerous sin. And that's because pride causes us to be self-absorbed and self-centered; it causes us to think more about ourselves than about others. Pride causes us to either ignore our own sin or to boast that it has no power over us. Either way, we are lying to ourselves, others and to God. Honest self-awareness is essential if we are going to turn away and resist the power of sin. If you and I fail to see our own inner tendencies to be self-absorbed, materialistic, lustful, boastful, stingy, unloving and more, then we'll find it easier not only to surrender to those tendencies but to also justify them.

Whereas there are those who fail to see the sin in their own lives and so they do not think they need to be forgiven, there are those on the opposite end of that spectrum who are uncertain that God will ever forgive them. Some of these people carry guilt or shame with them from long ago events and others tend to pick up a new load of guilt every day. Feeling some measure of guilt is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, we are meant to feel remorse when we've done something wrong. Feelings of remorse move us to repentance, to reconciliation, and to avoiding the same behavior in the future. One of the fundamental and beautiful assertions of Scripture is that "*God is rich in mercy and abounding in steadfast love.*" Jesus revealed this, and from the time of his birth through his resurrection, he offered grace to sinners. Throughout the Gospels Jesus told parables about God's willingness to forgive sins, and he was known by his critics as a "friend of sinners." In the upper room, only a short while before he was arrested, Jesus took a cup of wine and after giving thanks he gave it to his disciples saying, "*Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:27-28). And then as he hung on the cross, he looked at his persecutors and prayed, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34). Consistently, Jesus revealed a God who is more willing to forgive than we are willing to ask.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for forgiveness is a word that means "release." As humans we do things that alienate us from God and people; these things become like weights or a heavy chain. The image that comes to my mind is Jacob Marley, Scrooge's business partner who appeared to him as one of his ghost

Thank you, Lord, for your amazing grace and your willingness to forgive us. Help us to trust in your mercy and to take to heart your promise that as far as the east is from the west, that is how far you remove our sin from us (Psalm 103). In these moments, O Lord, wash us clean and make us new. As receivers of your mercy, help us to also be bearers of your mercy. Help us not to hold onto the burden of resentment, but to forgive and release it. Help us, Lord, to forgive others as you forgive us.

And now as you continue to be in an attitude of prayer, if there is someone you need to forgive, I want you to pray right now for that person for yourself and for God to help you forgive... We thank you, O God, for your forgiveness as we open our hearts to receive your love and grace and as we open our hearts to offer your love and grace to others. We pray in the name of Jesus who died for our sins, Amen.