

## **I BELIEVE IN GOD...**

Apostles' Creed Sermon Series, week 1  
A Sermon by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

Psalm 19:1-4  
Acts 17:24-28, Romans 1:20

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How many of you are familiar with the Apostles' Creed? Perhaps you grew up saying it regularly during Sunday morning worship. Perhaps like me, you were required to memorize it during Confirmation classes as a teenager. The word "Creed" comes from the Latin word, "Credo." "Credo" is the first word of the Apostles' Creed, and it means "I believe." For six weeks, we will say the Apostles' Creed during worship, so if you are not familiar with it, you will have the opportunity to become more familiar with it. There are additional historical creeds, like the Nicene creed. It and other statements of faith can be found towards the back of our hymnal. However, the Apostles' Creed is clearly the best known as well as one of the earliest and most enduring attempts by Christians to summarize and make definitive statements about our essential beliefs. Parts of the creed date back to the second century, and its current form took shape in the 400's.

I realize that not everyone is fan of creeds, and that's okay. But even if knowing and saying creeds is not something you particularly like doing, it is still important that each one of us as a person of faith know what we believe. After all, what we believe has the power to shape our lives and motivate us to action, sacrifice and service. In my January Bell Tower article, which I assume all of you read this past week, I mentioned that what we believe tends to result in deeply held convictions that shape and motivate us. They lead some people to do great harm and others to live sacrificially in service to others. The example I gave was that whereas some have convictions that lead them to join the Ku Klux Klan, others have convictions that lead them to join the Sisters of Charity.

What we believe matters, because our most deeply held beliefs or convictions have a significant impact on our everyday decision making and the way we choose to live. What we believe shapes our goals, ambitions, hopes, and behaviors. What I believe had an impact on my career choice, who I married, and on how I parented my children. What I believe impacts the way I see right and wrong, what I do with my time and money, and how I face adversity. Over the years, what I believe has led me to say "no" to many things I may have said "yes" to, and to say "yes" to things I might otherwise have said "no" to.

I certainly cannot cover everything we believe as Christians in six weeks. When I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary, I read some very thick Christian theology books and was tested on the Christian beliefs discussed in those books. What's nice about the Apostles' Creed is that it is a foundational, familiar, and simplified expression of what we believe as Christians. Its length makes it possible to cover in six weeks. All the points of the Apostles' creed are attested to in scripture, and it was developed to teach people about the basics of faith, the "ABC's" of faith.

The Apostles' Creed begins with the statement, *"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."* As Christians, our faith begins with belief

atheist wants to believe in God. Somewhere along the line you and I look at all the evidence and we make a choice. The fact is, 85% of the world's population believe in a God. Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians all believe in a Supreme Being, a Higher intelligence. Throughout most of human history, the argument for God's existence started with the fact that the universe exists and we exist. *"Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made"* (Romans 1:20).

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge..."* (Psalm 19:1-2). The Psalmist, Paul and so many others throughout history have believed that the existence of the universe itself points to the existence of God. I believe in God in part because I am; because I think and reason and love and perceive. I believe that my existence and your existence point to something greater than we are.

I also believe because of the thousands of moments in prayer, scripture reading and reflection when I've felt something – Someone – offering comfort, assurance, guidance, and grace. Within me is a need to trust, to give thanks, to praise, to worship One who is not only greater than myself, but who also wants to be in a relationship with me. I feel connected with God when I take a long walk and pause to give thanks. I feel deep peace amidst physical and emotional storms when I turn to God in prayer. I feel most fully alive when I am doing the things Jesus described as God's will. When singing and praying and listening in worship, I inevitably hear God speaking to me, or I feel my heart "strangely warmed" by a Presence. I am aware that an atheist has explanations for chemicals washing through my brain and causing these experiences or they say such experiences are simply wishful thinking. But to me, the simplest explanation is that these experiences point to something or Someone that is real.

In my life I often experience coincidences that seem to involve more than chance – intuitions to do something, to call someone, to go somewhere. Dozens of times, maybe hundreds of times I've done something I've felt nudged to do, and then I find myself in a place where I was needed or where I needed to be. These "coincidences" as some might call them seem more often to be "God-incidences." Over the years, I've come to trust that there is One who nudges me, guides me, and leads me if I pay attention. I believe in God because, though Darwin got some things right in his classic work "On the Origin of Species," humans demonstrate an interesting capacity to violate the laws of natural selection. When we care for the weak, when we show compassion to the struggling, when we choose to love our enemies, we are acting counter to the laws of natural selection but consistent with an inner law that is written on our hearts. I believe this inner law reflects humanity at its best, and it points to the One in whose image we were created.

None of what I've just shared proves God's existence, and a committed atheist would already be formulating arguments against what I've said. We each must weigh the same data and our experiences and then come to the conclusions upon which we build our convictions and our life. But when it comes to the foundation upon which I choose to build my life, I am led by the fact of my existence, by what I see, by my experiences, by the intuitions of my soul, and by the witness of Jesus Christ to say, *"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."*