

June 11 I Believe in God

Psalm 19:1-4

Adam Hamilton has recently released a new book on the Apostle's Creed titled amazingly enough, "Creed." Many of us grew up in churches where every Sunday we recited this creed or the Nicene Creed. Over the years, most United Methodist congregations dropped this from their Sunday worship. You still find some denominations that weekly recite one of the creeds.

With the loss of the frequent saying of the creeds we no longer have a connection to these deep theological roots of our faith. The early creeds were hammered out in often contentious gatherings when the early church was trying to define what it believed and, just as importantly, what they did not believe. They are the building blocks on which all future theology was based.

Many miss saying the creeds, feeling we have lost something important. I do not believe we have lost much. What I mean is that when I was younger and this was a part of the service I memorized the Apostles Creed as part of my 4th grade Sunday School class. I was proud when I finally said by memory along with everyone else. Yet, we never really talked about its meaning. It was something we said, something we did. They were words without life.

Today we had you recite the Apostles Creed. Did you pay attention to the words? Do you know why they are in the creed or what they mean? Over the next few weeks, with help from Adam Hamilton's book, we are going to look at these core beliefs because, "What we believe matters!"

What are some of your most deeply held beliefs? Ultimately, our most deeply held beliefs shape our goals, ambitions, hopes and dreams. Moving outside the church for a moment think about the following: If you served in the military and believe that freedom is bought at a steep price that is going to define your opinions as to military expenditures in the federal budget. If, on the other hand, you believe diplomacy is now the best way to keep our freedom and find global peace then you would have a

decidedly different attitude as to federal budget expenditures. Beliefs shape our thinking and our responses. Beliefs matter!

Today we begin with the essential belief of our faith and all of the great monotheistic faiths. "I believe in God." We believe there is one God. The creed adds something to this belief in God.

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

We believe the God we worship is also a creative God. Our Psalm that we shared this morning celebrates this when it says: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Yet the fundamental question that we must address is: "Is there a God?" We might think that is a pretty silly first question but there is an increasing number of people who reject the idea that there is a God. Many others live their daily lives as though there is no God while giving mental assent to the idea of God. They are called "practical atheists." Others reject the so called Christian God often portrayed in the media, a God many now see equated with anti-intellectualism, violence or bigotry.

The question of whether there is a God is unlikely to be resolved by science. Theists and atheists can look at the same data that Christians look at and reach different conclusions. I see the fingerprints of God when I read the work of scientists. To me the mysterious, invisible forces that gave rise to our universe and hold it together seem to be the handiwork of God. The scientist instead uses words like dark energy and dark matter when talking about things not fully understood but which play a critical role in shaping and sustaining the universe.

I grasp and accept that Darwin's theory of evolution is a brilliant and helpful way of understanding the differentiation of life on our planet. But knowing the mechanism (evolution) does not therefore disprove that there was One who designed the mechanism and worked through it.

A simple analogy is what would it take for cocoa, eggs, flour, sugar and oil to assemble themselves spontaneously into a three-layer chocolate cake. No matter how

many billion years we might wait, there will be no cake without its being mixed, baked, and iced by someone who knows what a chocolate cake should look and taste like.

When the atheist considers the universe, our planet and life on the planet there will always be a natural explanation that does not require God—some x-factor that helps to explain the inexplicable. For Christians this x-factor, this unseen force behind the existence and development of the universe is God.

Adam Hamilton says this which is so powerful: “I believe in God because, though Darwin got many things right, humans demonstrate an interesting capacity to violate the laws of natural selection in how we live as a species. When we are for the weak, when we are faithful to a spouse, when we show compassion to the struggling and choose to love our enemies, we are acting counter to the laws of natural selection but consistent with an inner law written on our hearts that we intuitively know is the right and good path. I believe that this inner law, points to the One in whose image we were created.”

So, we will never be able to scientifically prove there is a God and those who reject God will see the same things we do with different conclusions, I believe the evidence for God is all around us. From the beauty of creation to the kindness we share with one another, we see God.

Even more, Christians believe that the God we worship is more than a Supreme Being that created the universe. The Creed, drawing from Jesus’ primary way of addressing God, speaks of God as Father, a very personal intimate and relational term. God is the force and power behind everything, and God is a being who defines the very meaning of personhood. Whatever makes us persons, Christians believe, is a reflection of God’s personhood. We are the best evidence that God exists! Because we believe this, the Bible teaches that we matter to God and that we have value and worth as human beings. We are not expendable cogs in the evolutionary machine. We are children of God. If God exists we are never alone.

Let me end by sharing a story of an encounter with God. I may have shared this with you before. Gus was a farmer in Colorado. In the early summer Jenny and I would enjoy driving along the country roads because of the wild sunflowers that lined them.

Their color added a certain beauty to the drive. On an intellectual level we knew these flowers were an invasive weed and farmers spent much time and money controlling and trying to eradicate them. For that reason we usually did not speak to our ranchers about how beautiful the drive was. One Sunday Gus got talking with me. He had to share with me an “aha” moment he had had that week. He had spent all morning mowing and then spraying those sunflowers. When lunch came he turned off the mowing machine to eat his sandwich. As he sat there he really noticed the flowers, how each petal was just like the one next to it and how they were so symmetrically spaced around the center. At that moment he realized this was more than a weed. It was a creation of God. And, if God could spend that much time on a weed how much more would God care about him! He truly felt the presence and love of God. When I asked Gus if that had caused him to go back home and find other chores to do, he said, “No, I had my encounter with God and then went back to mowing and spraying!”

We proclaim God exists, a God who creates, who loves, and who is personally invested in us. What we believe matters and this belief should challenge us in how we relate to all people. For they too are people whom God loves and is personally invested in.