

June 18 – Father’s Day

I Believe in Jesus Christ

John 1:1-5

What sets Christianity apart from other faiths is its specific beliefs about Jesus. In the Apostles Creed we have the earliest formal statement about who Jesus was. We are going to look very briefly at these affirmations and then ask, why it matters to us. You need to be aware that books have been written about some of these statements so there is only so much we can do in the time we have today.

I believe in Jesus Christ,

As a pastor, I am amazed at the number of people who believe Christ is Jesus’ last name. Christ can be translated Messiah or more correctly, anointed one. To say Jesus is the Christ is to say he is the anointed one sent from God. He is the long awaited Messiah, the promised one. This little phrase connects all the Messianic longings, promises and desires associated with the prophets of the Old Testament to Jesus.

His (God’s) only Son our Lord

This phrase carries much more weight than we often give it. In the time of the early church, when these words were put down in this creed, all of the Roman Empire proclaimed that Caesar is Lord. That meant, Caesar is the one to whom you owed your absolute allegiance. To say Jesus is our Lord is also to say Caesar is not my lord. This phrase reminds you to whom you give your allegiance. Also, in this culture there were many stories of the Roman or Greek gods having children with women creating demi-gods. They wanted to remind us that Jesus was unique, the only son of God, who is the anointed one, our Lord, the one to whom we offer all our allegiance. Wow, that is a lot to pack into one little phrase.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

The concept of the Virgin Birth is something many Christians struggle with today. It flies in the face of much of what we know through science. It has become one of those touchstones of controversy. Some in the church state that you must believe this doctrine, no exceptions if you are to be a Christian. Others point to it as a reason to reject Christianity as anti-intellectual. We need to realize that it is possible to be a Christian and not believe in the virgin birth. When you read the Gospel of Mark you will find that there is no birth story. This means that Jesus' birth was not important to Mark when writing this earliest narrative. When you read John's prologue, as we did this morning, there is no mention of a virgin birth. Instead you have a totally different emphasis, the pre-existent word coming to live amongst us.

Both John, Matthew and Luke were trying to get at a concept bigger than words, that Jesus was God in human form. They were trying to paint a picture of this awesome idea with words. For Matthew, in particular, seeing Jesus' birth as the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy about a virgin conceiving gets us to that point. For John, it was the idea that the word, the creative part of God, came and lived among us. While it is not important to believe in the virgin birth to be a Christian, it is important to believe Jesus was God in flesh. The rest of the divine story of salvation makes no sense without this key idea.

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died and as buried.

Again, one of the theological issues of the early church, and it is still one we struggle with today, was the question, "Why did Jesus die on a cross?" When you have Old Testament scriptures talking about those hanging on a tree being cursed by God his crucifixion is a problem. When you proclaim Jesus to be God in human form and then have him powerless and dying, it is a problem, because God doesn't die.

Many early church theologies struggled with this. Some rejected the whole idea of the Divine Jesus being crucified. One early doctrine stated that the divine Jesus exited the body and only the human Jesus was crucified. Another philosophy believed that one of the disciples, perhaps Judas, was substituted in Jesus' place

It was important for the early church to state Jesus, the divine human Jesus, suffered and died. From this simple statement has come a river of explanations as to the why of it. The one that was most predominant for hundreds of years is the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement. Simply put, Jesus had to die in our place so we might be saved. Yet the concept that a loving God would require such a brutal death before

saving us has always left some people ill at ease. This doctrine seems to reject much of what Jesus came to proclaim concerning the loving, forgiving nature of God. The meaning of the crucifixion, for me, is that it shows the lengths God will go to remind us that we are loved and that we matter. I don't need Jesus to die to believe God will forgive my sin. But, there are times when I am feeling lost, going through challenging times and more, and it is then that I look at the cross and realize I am not alone. God is with me. God understands my pain because God has experienced them as well. The crucifixion reminds me that our pain and sorrows don't separate us from God, for God is with us and even points to the possibility that there might be something redemptive in our pain.

On the Third day he rose again;

Jesus' resurrection is absolutely essential to our faith. If Christ was not raised, then evil, hate, sin and death have the final word in Jesus' life and in our lives. Jesus' resurrection was God's dramatic way of making clear that these things do not have the final word. The resurrection reminds us that we worship a God who brings life, newness and hope.

He ascended into heaven. Is seated at the right hand of the Father And will come again to judge the living and the dead

One of the earliest statements of the church was *Maranatha* or "Come Lord Jesus." The earliest Christians believe Jesus would come again soon, even during their lifetime. Because of some of the bad theologies out there today surrounding the rapture, this concept has almost disappeared from the theologies of most mainline churches. But we still need to hold on to this truth. It means that God is not done with things here on earth. It means that we are still required to do what we can to make a difference, to get it ready for his coming. Yes, there is a message of judgement but even more of hope. We are not alone, God came once and will come again.

Now, what does all of this mean and does it matter today? Yes, we believe in Jesus, but does that belief make any difference in how we live and what we do? It should! Because we believe in Jesus, who was sent by God to live among us, we believe that he came to call us to be authentically human as God created us. We as humans are good! This is in contrast to many theologies that say we are inherently evil and have to be redeemed. We believe that, through Jesus, God says, "I love you to each and every one of us." In Jesus, God showed that God cares about those who are

lost and those who are made to feel small. God showed us compassion for the sick. He showed us how to love and to forgive. In Jesus' death, God shows us the depth of God's love and the costliness of that love. In the resurrection we are reminded that God has defeated evil, hate, sin and death. We are then challenged to share that love with others. This means we should be willing to love, give, serve and forgive.

In closing let me share one story I read that shares why belief in Jesus matters. His brother had stolen from him as well as his parents to support his habit. At one time he had said that he would never talk to this brother again. The family, for their own safety, had asked this brother to stay away. He had not spoken for years to any of them. Then their mother found out she was dying of cancer. Her daughter asked her if there was anything they could do. She wanted to see her son, one last time. So, the family started talking to his old friends. They learned that he had been in prison but had also gotten clean. Finally, the oldest brother drove up to a place of business to speak to the brother he had vowed never to talk to again. The man he encountered was so different from the one he had last seen. He was a mechanic, skilled in his trade. He was married, had two children and had become active in a church. When he was told that his mother wanted to see him again he looked at his brother and said, "I have stayed away because that was the family's wish. After all the pain I caused them I felt that it was the least I could do. Do you want me to come? If not, you can make up any story you want to make mother's last days comfortable. You can even say I died. I don't want to cause any of you any more pain." When his brother insisted on his coming he also wanted to know what had happened to change him. The brother said, "I now strive to follow Jesus' example instead of my own desires." Needless to say there was a joyous reunion as mom got to see her son again and meet two grandchildren she did not know she had.

Belief in Jesus and his life and teachings makes a difference or it should. How do you need to live your life differently because of the Apostles Creed statement, I believe in Jesus?