

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE, SUNDAY AUGUST 13,
20127, BY THE REVEREND HELEN GIBSON-WHITE**

EIGHTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT THE HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE

THE CREEDS

The Creeds are statements of the orthodox faith of the Christian church. They are the shared beliefs of the religious communities in a form that summarises core beliefs, and they established much of what is now known as orthodox Christian teaching on the subject of God, the person of Christ and the Trinity. They are accepted by all major branches of the Christian faith.

At that time there were some heresies (or heretical teachings) that threatened the church, and the Creeds were written to oppose these. Notable among them was Arianism, which distorted the understanding of the person of Christ.

The Roman Emperor Constantine had legalized the church in 313A.D. and he convened the Council of Nicaea, a gathering of bishops in the town of Nicaea in 325 A.D.. The Council was convened in an effort to obtain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all the then Christendom. The goal was to settle the issue of the nature of the Son (Jesus) and his relationship to God the Father. Constantine is reported to have said, "... for me, internal division in the church of God is graver than any war or fierce battle, and these things appear to cause more pain than secular affairs." The Council resulted in the first uniform statement of Christian doctrine, **the Nicene Creed**, which we say every Sunday in our Communion Service.

The Arian controversy was proposed by Arius of Alexandria. It denied that Christ was divine, and said that he was not equal to God the Father, but was a created being. The Council at Nicaea condemned Arius and incorporated the word *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος) meaning "one in essence," or "of one substance" with the Father. This was totally opposed to Arius' teaching because it declared the absolute equality of the Son with the Father.

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty ... we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, Begotten not made, of one being with the Father

Then the **Apostles' Creed**, traditionally ascribed to Jesus' apostles.

I believe in God, the Father almighty ... and in Jesus Christ, God's Only Son, our Lord ..."

Jesus Christ has the ultimate authority – he is "our Lord," and his authority in which we put our faith is sown in the love he embodied by coming to our humanity – "born of the virgin Mary. A real, fully human body who actually died – "was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead."

Jesus' resurrection, not that he came back to life as Lazarus did for example, but that he still lives – *“and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.”*

Then the **Athanasian Creed** whose author is traditionally thought to be Athanasius of Alexandria. You will find the text at the very back of our Prayer Book (*A Prayer Book for Australia*) on page 487.* It is a very complex statement indeed! It is a statement of belief focused on the doctrine of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ – his humanity and his divinity – three persons, one godhead.

*For the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God;
And yet they are not three Gods but one God. So likewise the
Father is Lord, the Son is Lord and the Holy Ghost is Lord, and
Yet not three Lords, but one Lord ...”*

Then we have the **affirmation of faith that we use in Baptism services**. So we can say that we have four creeds in the Prayer Book. In answer to the questions b put to them the candidates say, “We believe in one God ... we believe in Jesus Christ ... we believe in the Holy Spirit ...” and the congregation responds,

*This is our faith; we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit. Amen.*

In these Creeds there is no mention of Jesus' earthly ministry – his healings, his teachings. The Creeds go straight from his birth to his death and resurrection.

As we say the Creed (usually the Nicene Creed, but sometimes the Apostles Creed), familiar words to us, it is good to think about what it took to form them. What it took those early church Fathers and Bishops ... meeting in Council together ... to stand against false teachings and hammer out their belief in the question that still confronts us today – who is Jesus Christ? What it took for them to preserve for ever the truth of the humanity and divinity of Christ. If Christ was not truly human, he could not identify completely with our humanity. If Christ was not divine he could not have “offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people,” as we say in the Thanksgiving Prayer at Holy Communion.

Father Lawrence Farley is a priest of the Orthodox Church in America and an author. I was reading an article he wrote about our church history. He said, “For us, wisdom and the way forward into the future comes from following in the trajectory of the past, not because we are bound by the limitations of those living long ago, but because we are freed by them from the tyranny of the present, a present with its blind spots and its slavery to fad and fashion. For us, tradition is not a straightjacket, but a set of wings. It means that we do not have to keep on trying to re-invent the wheel, only to get the shape wrong because current fashion favours octagons over circles. The confession of the creeds has served as the doctrinal bedrock, a witness to the basis of our faith and a safeguard of our unity.”

The person of Jesus Christ ...who is he? And, personally, who is Jesus Christ for you and me? Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" He still asks it of us today. Each of us has to decide who Jesus is for us ... an attractive, fascinating figure of history, or a living reality to whom we can commit our lives and from whom we will receive grace and guidance to live our lives.

What do we mean when we speak about "committing our lives to Jesus?" Everyone who has ever acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord would have their own personal response to that. Here is what one anonymous person has said:-

"Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life because I have come to the conclusion that the way he lived our human experience is the ultimate or truest way to do so. While I cannot fully embody his ultimate qualities, he nevertheless gives me grace to continue to search for and to follow his way. When I fail to do so as I constantly do, I am assured of his forgiveness, but of course, not freed of his discipline. He is my Lord because I believe that the love he embodied is a living-out in time of an eternal love which lives for ever at the heart of things. Finally – and my response is anything but final because in thee few sentences I have only begun to respond graspingly to a blinding mystery – Jesus is Lord and Christ for me, because I have come to believe that, by his death and resurrection, I have been shown a profound truth about the whole of creation. God's last word about creation is not death, but resurrection."

Every day in Christian communities around the world, in great cathedrals, in parish churches, in tiny chapels and house churches, Christians confess the basic belief that unites us all in the words of a creed. The belief that holds together the persecuted church of today as it did the persecuted church of the first centuries.

In today's service here at St Andrew's we now come to the Creed. As we say it, may we feel a real sense of gratitude to our forebears in the faith, for their courage and perseverance in forming and preserving our core belief. "We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen."

* * * * *

*The Athanasian Creed. Page 487 of A Prayer Book For Australia

Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith.

Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholick Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate.
The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.
The Father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.
And yet there are not three eternal: but one eternal.
As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated: but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.
So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty.
And yet they are not three Almighty: but one Almighty.
So the Father is God, the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God.
And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.
So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord.
And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.
For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
So we are forbidden by the Catholick Religion: to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.
The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten.
The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created, but begotten.
The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.
So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.
And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another;
But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal.
So that in all things, as is aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
He therefore that will be saved: must thus think of the Trinity.
Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;
God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the substance of his Mother, born in the world;
Perfect God, and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting;
Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood.
Who although he be God and Man: yet he is not two, but one Christ;
One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood in to God;
One altogether; not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person.
For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ;
Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.
He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies: and shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.