

Foundations: I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth

January 16, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Gen 1:1

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

John 1:1-3

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

When my wife worked as a bank teller, she had to learn the difference between what was real money and what was counterfeit. If she studied all the counterfeits, she would not really have learned what she needed nor would she ever finish her training. There are new counterfeits being created all the time. What she was trained to do was to learn about the real thing. If she learned what real money looked like, felt like, and other ways to discern what was real, then she could more readily identify what was not real. We live in an era where many people, even many churches, are confused about what real belief is. Some could not tell you why they believe what they do or why they would call themselves Christians. In order to find out what our beliefs are, we need to study what is real. Only then can we readily identify what is counterfeit.

Any more, Christians seem to be identified by what we are against. As a consequence, we are generally labelled as judgmental, bigoted, and narrow-minded. So, rather than talk about what we are against, we Christians should have a better grasp on what we are for. Thus, why I felt that this new sermon series, called "Foundations," is necessary. For example, one member recently contacted me about a pastor of one of her friend's church who announced from the pulpit that the Bible is an outdated document and that we can't really rely on it anymore as a guide for our lives. Folks, if the Holy Scriptures do not serve as a guide for our lives, then we have no foundation on which to base our Christian faith. If we are to continue to be a vital witness of the Christian Church, it is necessary for us to have a common foundation with other Bible-based churches around the world.

For the next twelve weeks we will be talking about a different aspect of the Apostles' Creed, which has been the foundation of the Christian church for thousands of years. We will be referencing the ecumenical version, since it is one that is accepted by the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Each of the twelve statements of the Apostles' Creed is based on Scripture, so we will be making those connections as well. The Apostles' Creed is just as relevant in living of life of faith as it was when it was first created.

Our study of the Apostles' Creed will be based on a series of devotions given by Timothy Tennent, who is the President of Asbury Theological Seminary located in Wilmore, Kentucky. We need a strong foundation to build upon if we are to be effective witnesses of the good news of Jesus Christ. So, let's begin by taking a look at the first statement in the Apostles' Creed.

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth

We believe that God is a triune God: one God, three persons. The Apostles' Creed reflects that by talking about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We will be talking about each Person of God in other sermons, but for this morning we will focus on God the Father.

I realize that a number of people don't even like to think of God as Father, primarily because they have not had good relationships with their earthly fathers, and the concern is that their relationship with their heavenly Father will be tainted by that perspective. Another reason is that some people resent referring to God with any kind of gender identifiers. They would rather just refer to God in neutral terms, such as God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer in lieu of using God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Let's address each one of these concerns. Just because people have had a difficult, or even bad, relationship with their earthly father, that doesn't mean that we should not continue to refer to God as our heavenly Father. God is the model of Fatherhood which should be lifted up and used as an example of what God intended fatherhood to be like. If we simply base our concept of fatherhood on what earthly fathers are capable of being and doing, we have less than perfection. Even if we had exemplary fathers here on earth, they pale in comparison to who and what our heavenly Father is and is capable of doing.

By simply referring to God as Creator, Redeemer or Sustainer, we do God an injustice. Our God is a personal God, who wants to be known for who he is not only by what he does or has done. If you are a parent and your child would refer to you only by what you do for that child, you would be rightly offended. If a child referred to you as "Fixer of My Breakfast" instead of father or "Cleaner of my Room" instead of mother, you would think there was something seriously wrong. The relationship you would want with your child would be preferably more personal and intimate. "Mommy" or "Daddy" or other terms of endearment warm the heart and let you know that someone truly loves and cares for you as the individual that you are.

The reason we call God our Father is because Jesus did so when he was teaching his disciples how to pray. Jesus referred to God the Father as "Abba," which translates into our language as "Daddy." Calling God Father was good enough for Jesus; it should be good enough for us. It was meant more as a term of endearment than as anything particularly gender-specific. The book of Genesis also tells us "God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

If the creed only said “ I believe in God... Creator of heaven and earth,” that would be something any Muslim or any Jew could agree with. By calling God “Father,” it sets our belief as different than any other faith system in this world. It affirms that not only is God Almighty and that he is our Creator, it emphasizes that God is our Father! What a blessing and what a gift that is to us! This means that not only does God know us, he wants to be known by us.

“*Fatherhood* denotes love, tenderness, nurture, and protection. *Almighty* denotes power, strength, authority, and might. The two beautifully complement one another. God has all power, but he exercises it in a way that reveals his love and compassion for us. In our own human experience, power and authority become abusive when they are not rooted in love and compassion. Likewise, love and compassion, however sincere, can degrade into mere sentimentality if not undergirded with power and authority. In God, these attributes find perfect balance and harmony.”¹

One of the amazing parts about being able to call God “Father” is that the Creator of the Universe also knows us by name. We are that important to him. I have to admit that I am not great at remembering names. But God is able to remember our names, and actually knows us better than we know ourselves. I thought I knew myself pretty well until I first heard a recording of my voice. Who’s that? I wondered. I hear my voice from within, through my ear canals. Everyone else hears my voice from the outside, and believe me, they are very different. God only knows our voice, He knows our inner thoughts. He knows why we think the way we do. He knows the number of hairs on our heads. I am not even interested in knowing all those details, but God is.

The opening statement of the Apostles’ Creed resonates so well the opening verse of our Bible: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** It is the beginning of everything and it is the glue that holds everything together. The song David sings in Psalm 8:1, which starts out with “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth,” goes on to show how insignificant we should be in the eyes of God: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” Yet, God our Father does care about each one us, and loves each one of us as the special and specific creations—that is, children—that we are.

There are some who claim that our world was created through a “Big Bang,” yet those same people are incapable of explaining how an explosion could create anything – other than a mess – which would defy all the other laws of science that applies to everything else. I would say that believing in the Big Bang depends on a much bigger leap of blind faith than the belief that an intelligent and compassionate God has created this ordered and marvelous universe. Everything works together too well and too specifically for it to be the result of some mindless Big Bang.

We believe in the God who is at one and the same time the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and is also the loving and compassionate Father we need to find purpose in this existence.

¹ Tennent, p. 10.

Anything less and we have nothing upon which to determine why we are put on this earth to begin with. We were put here to worship God and to flourish under his ever-present guidance.