

Final Creed Sermon – Summary of the Nicene Creed series - Sunday 15th September

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Romans 10:9-17

John 3:1-16

Most of you will know that Kate and I usually take our holidays in Scotland – with the West Coast and the Islands being our favourite areas to visit and spend time. When it is possible we make a point of travelling by train – we are great fans of train travel for all sorts of reasons. It gives a chance to get a good look at both countryside and town and it is much better for the environment (and much less stressful) than adding yet another car to the overloaded M6.

The journey to Glasgow is one that has become very well known to us over recent years. We leave from Birmingham New Street, and the train generally calls at Wolverhampton, Stafford, Crewe, Warrington, Wigan, Preston, Lancaster, Penrith and Carlisle before finally arriving in Glasgow. From there we change stations for a somewhat slower journey with many more stops as we travel on to Oban.

As we stop at those stations - those towns, and as we speed through other towns, we get a glimpse of what the town or city is like. We see housing, parks, shops, factories and industrial units, churches and castles; we see people in gardens, people walking their dogs, cars waiting at level crossings, we look at views of the surrounding countryside and much more besides. But even when we stop at a station we only get a faint impression of the town. We don't really know it.

Indeed, to get to know somewhere you need to spend time there. Maybe a few hours will give us an insight; a few days will help us get to know it quite well but it would take a lifetime to know somewhere well. I have lived and ministered in Shirley for close on seven years now, but I was in awe on Tuesday at the mens curry evening as some of those present regaled stories of Shirley pubs long since closed down, Shirley shops that only live in memories and a cinema on Stratford Road where they took their first girlfriends. I realised that in many ways I hardly know Shirley at all as I know so little of its history, the things that have made it what it is today.

To know somewhere thoroughly you have to live there. And to know somewhere even better you need to explore the countryside, the villages and the towns that surround it; to find out about its standing in relation to its wider surroundings. Its like when you catch another train down a branch line that leads off from the town's station.

But why am I telling you all this?

Today our sermon series on the Nicene Creed comes to an end (thank goodness you might say!). We have looked at every phrase in the creed and thought a bit more deeply about each one. Today is an opportunity to wrap things up, to summarise if you like.

And to do so I want us to think about that train journey. Because believe it or not I think there are similarities between the Nicene creed and the railway journey to Scotland. Let me explain.

Each Sunday we recite the creed, moving quickly from one phrase to another; from one subject to another. From God the Father and Creator, to Jesus, onto his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and his final coming in judgement ; then The Holy Spirit, the church, forgiveness and finally everlasting life. We barely stop to consider each phrase. Like a train that either passes through a station or stops very briefly to allow passengers off and on we hurry on through.

This sermon series has given us time to get off the train. To have a look around, to think about the buildings, the streets, the open spaces and the people that make up the town. We probably feel that we know the town – be it incarnation, resurrection or the church or whatever – just a bit better. But we also recognise there is still much we don't know.

Like the other preachers in the Parish, as I have prepared for the sermons I have done some research. I have read books and articles by people who know the subject well, people who have lived in the town for many years and know what makes it tick. I have used some of the things I have read, and put them together to provide a simple guide which I have preached on a Sunday morning – a bit like a Lonely Planet guide to the resurrection or whatever the topic is. But its only been a summary, a brief look, a short guide.

But perhaps what we have done over these weeks has whetted your appetite. Maybe there are some phrases in the creed you would like to spend more time on, to think deeper about. If that's the case have a word with me or with one of the others on the ministry team. We would love to help you explore further; we will point you towards further material; we will even go on the walk with you as together we investigate backstreets and side turnings. We will learn more together.

We are also planning an Open to Questions morning in a couple of weeks on Saturday 12th October to which you can bring any question about Christian faith and practice – and maybe we can do some exploring together on some of the topics we have looked at over these weeks. There will be more information about the morning in the pewslip and the magazine shortly.

And of course it may be that the little bit you have heard about some of the phrases, the little you do know about the towns, has made you think you never want to go there again – but I hope that's not the case!

So as we continue to say the creed week by week, it may well be that your mind goes back to what you have heard this summer, and that those recollections will put more meaning on the phrases of the creed. Just like a train journey gets more interesting the more you know about the places you travel through, as you glimpse streets you have walked down or castles and churches you have visited, so the creed will speak more clearly to you.

But the main purpose of the train journey of course is to get us from Birmingham to Glasgow whether we know anything about the towns we pass through or not. And even if you have missed some of the sermons in the series, or if they haven't helped your understanding, the important thing is that as you recite it the creed still summarises the faith you hold on to, the Christian journey you are on.

I hope you have found the series not just interesting but helpful and informative. I hope its been something that's made you think just a bit deeper about what you believe; something that has kindled a flame within you to find out even more, to understand things better.

And just as it takes living in a town to get to know it best, to understand the creed in greater depth we have to live it out. We need to let the phrases and the thoughts behind those phrases become part of who we are, letting our daily lives reflect the love of God. We need to follow the example of Jesus and be guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. And just as living in a new place slowly changes us, so as we live out the creed we will find ourselves becoming more like Jesus, we will show forgiveness, we experience the fullness of life that Jesus offers.

I hope that the things you have learned will mean that your journey of faith as you live out your Christian life will be just that little more fulfilling. I hope too that this exploration of the creed might encourage you to take further journeys in the future down some other branch lines, finding out more about other areas of your faith, and growing even more in your knowledge of God and what he has in store for you.

And so can I wish you all happy travelling and Bon Voyage!