

Genesis 1: 26- 2:3 ; Ephesians 3: 14-21; John 14: 8-14

“We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty”

The Creed

“chaos is the law of nature, order is the dream of humankind” is a paraphrase from the writings of a 19th century American writer called Henry Adams, who was criticising the scientific world’s attempts to make the complexities of the world fit into neat scientific conclusions. It seems to reflect the sentiment that while disorder is natural - humans strive to create structure and organization.

If that sounds like you, and it certainly sounds like me, then we are not on our own and find ourselves in interesting company, including Roman emperors from the 4th century. Because it is from this period, and in their attempts to bring some sort of order from a chaotic situation, that we find ourselves reciting the creeds of the church: the subject of our sermon series which begins today and will run through the next few months.

The creed which we are concentrating on technically known as the Nicene- Constantinople creed, was finally agreed in the year 381, and has been part of the western church ever since. The Roman world had just adopted Christianity as its official religion, not only were there multiple creeds circulating around Christian churches of the Roman Empire, but there were multiple gods, still very much in the hearts, minds, and worship practices of many of the populations in the Roman Empire.

It was quite chaotic, and like many who find themselves in charge of something, those who ruled wanted to bring a sense of order and unity. When we look at the history of the church, I'll leave you to decide whether they achieved it or not!

But creeds are an important part of our liturgy, we have some sort of creed or affirmation of faith, every week, but I wonder how many of

us take the time to look through them slowly and carefully, and reflect on what we actually are saying we believe.

“We believe”

The creed begins with those very words “We believe”, a statement which speaks of unity and common agreement. Belief is a key component in faith - not the only one, but we have to believe what or who we put our faith in.

If we truly believe in something, then it will have a profound impact on our lives. An advertising slogan at Wembley on Friday night stated, *“with belief comes change, change that lasts forever”* and I think this really does reflect something of what the emperor and the church were trying to do when they agreed this creed. Gone would be the multiple gods; and gone would be the disagreement over some of the key arguments of the period, particularly surrounding who Jesus was, and which we will come to hear all about over these next few weeks.

The creed is asking us to believe, to put our faith in, a set of bold statements about the nature and story of God as it has been handed down from those who knew and follow Jesus. The creed is not a set of good practises and behaviours for everyday life, such as the Ten Commandment; but an intellectual understanding of God, in order to clear up confusion, and to triumph over heresy, or incomplete or incorrect beliefs. At least that was the theory - and in many ways like now, back then, there were many theories and many gods, so that is where the creed starts.

“in one God, the Father”

For Romans, belief in one God was complex and controversial. The emperor was considered a God, and worthy of worship, which had led to many different persecutions of Christians, for whom Jesus was the subject of their worship. But of course there were other gods, loads of them in the Roman pantheon. Now they were being asked to believe in the one God.

For Christians, coming out of the Jewish faith of course, one God was how the Scriptures started, all the way back in Genesis – the single God of creation which opposed many of the myths of how the earth was created by multiple gods.

But of course, Jesus took this much further, and called this one God, Father. There are many reasons for this, and the church's theologians have written about them over the years, but I think that for Jesus "Father" signifies a deep, personal, and loving relationship between them. He used the word "Abba" or daddy. This reflects the intimacy and the close bonds that Jesus had with God and spoke off to others. And this is an intimacy which is so close that, as today's Gospel shows, and as the creed tries to convey, both Father and Son are one.

What Jesus was teaching implicitly and explicitly, was that anybody who wanted to, anyone who believed, could also enjoy that close, intimate and loving relationship with God, the perfect Father, who gives good gifts, whose name is hallowed, and into whose hands we can all commit our lives in life and death.

"the Almighty"

It isn't just the *One* God that takes us back to genesis but also the *Almighty* God, the next aspect of God that we are saying we believe in. I wonder what comes to your mind when you hear the word almighty?

It is indeed a word with many different meanings, and the Hebrew word 'Shaddai' from which we get our word almighty, has many different meanings including wilderness, mountains and destroyer. Certainly, the Scriptures would attest to God being found in those aspects - we think of the Israelites in the wilderness, Moses at Mount Sinai, and there is much about destruction, whether that's the destruction of evil, false Gods or those who worshipped them. It isn't always comfortable reading, but its there.

However, the reading from Genesis today also reveals another aspect of what it is for God to be *almighty*.

“God said to them ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it’ - the word *almighty* is linked to fertility. In fact, one of the translations of this word actually means, ‘the breasted one’; an image of life and femininity and a very good balance to the language of Father. We have in this interpretation, a beautiful image of God as a Mother.

So, to believe then in God *Almighty*, in this sense, is to have faith in a God who gifts us life, and nurtures us through it with an unconditional, divine love.

Truth

Well unlike the citizens of 4th century Rome, we do have a liberty to choose what we believe in, and what to commit to. And therefore the creed that we recite is not so much as to try and bring an order to chaos, but it is to help us draw nearer to God and does give us a foundation of our understanding of who God is, even though each aspect of it will throw up numerous other questions. But that is a good thing, because if it does then it shows that we are taking care to look carefully at what we're saying we believe in.

But also, as well as the emperor's search for conformity, we can't forget the Church's desire for truth. The creed then, is not just for political gain, but comes with a desire to establish the truth about God, a truth Jesus said would set us free. And truth has an unending importance.

So I invite you to take some time, and ponder just what it means to say that: “we believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty”. Amen.

Revd Richard Haynes

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