

## **I believe in God the Father**

### **Acts 17, Matt 11, Psalm 121**

Friends, sometimes we experience moments when old truths are upended,  
and it can be disorientating when it happens.

Earlier this year I read with shock that sun exposure is good for you,  
in fact I read an article where one medical doctor  
said that patients with minor sun damage on their skin  
are—the statistics tell us—likely to live longer than average.  
The sun is good for your cardiovascular health, apparently.  
Getting *sunburnt* however, remains very dangerous  
and increases the likelihood of skin cancer.

But after years of hearing the message to slip slop slap,  
it was unsettling to hear the news that, to a point, the sun is good for you!

At home I recently discovered  
that our eggs come in cartons marked with 5 health stars.  
Now that was a surprise.  
I remember being told that eggs were only a 'sometimes food'.  
Now they are one of the healthiest things to eat.

We used to be told to eat a low fat diet, now some fats are good.  
Cholesterol used to be bad.  
Now some of it is still bad, but some cholesterol is good.  
Are you confused? So am I!

Sometimes it's hard to know what it is we should believe;  
sometimes it feels like we can't be sure of anything!  
*Don't have carbs for breakfast, have bacon and eggs instead!*  
*No! eggs will give you a heart attack and bacon is too processed!*  
*Then again, cutting carbs will reduce your weight and that's important!*  
Who knows what to do!

Thank goodness the Christian Faith is not like the world of nutrition.  
James 1:17 reminds us that God does not change like shifting shadows.  
Hebrews 13:8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.  
The God of the Christian faith doesn't change,  
and we Christians have believed and trusted in this same God for centuries.

Today we begin a sermon series reminding ourselves of who this unchanging God is  
and what it is we believe about him.

For almost 2000 years, Christians have summarized these unchanging truths

in the words of three creeds that we say aloud when gathered together.  
The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe”.  
and so a creed is a summary of what we think and trust to be true about God.

The least known of these creeds is the *Athanasian Creed*.

In all my years of going to church,  
I can only remember saying this creed twice.  
If you care to google it, you’ll see why! Despite its good theology,  
It’s very long and cumbersome to say out loud.

The other two we know much better.

The *Nicene Creed*, which is traditionally said at Holy Communion  
and is named after the Turkish city where it was first put together,  
and thirdly the *Apostles Creed* which is the shortest and oldest of the three.

The Apostles Creed is called the *Apostle’s Creed*,

not because it was written by the Apostles,  
but because it summarizes what the Apostles taught in the NT.  
It’s based on an even older creed that was used in the ancient church at Rome,  
and when new Christians were about to be baptized  
they would be asked to say this creed as a summary of what they believe.  
That’s something we still do today;  
the Apostles Creed forms part of our baptism services.

So the Apostles creed is a summary of the basics of the Christian faith,  
basics that don’t change, basics that we believe and trust.  
For the next seven weeks these are basics that we will be thinking about  
as we use the Apostles Creed as a framework for our sermons.

And so how does the Apostles Creed begin?

Well, it sounds almost too obvious to state,  
but the Creed begins with us Christians declaring *I believe in God*.

As Christians we are theists!

We believe that there is more to life and the universe than physical matter,  
we believe that there us a God  
and that the existence of this God has implications for us and our world.

The idea of atheism being a serious philosophy is only a couple of hundred years old.  
Very few people throughout history have concluded that God doesn’t exist

For our second Bible reading today I chose Paul’s sermon in Acts 17

As Luke sets the scene he describes Athens as a city full of idols,  
and when Paul stands up to speak his first words are to say  
“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious!”

Don't for a moment think that intelligence and belief in God are mutually exclusive!  
 Athens was the intellectual capital of the ancient world  
 A modern day equivalent might be to set this scene in Oxford or Cambridge  
 This was the place where, verse 21, All who lived there  
 spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.

The ancient greeks where innovators  
 in literature, in politics, in warfare, in architecture,  
 yet they were humble enough to believe  
 that beyond all their achievements there was a spiritual world,  
 and they were *particularly* aware  
 that this spiritual world demanded something from them.

There's a sense of insecurity among these Athenians, did you pick that up?  
 They're trying to appease as many Gods as possible with all these temples  
 and they even build a shrine to an *unknown God*, verse 23.  
 So the issue facing the Athenians is not whether the spiritual world exists,  
 but it's the question of *who* exactly do we worship and *how* do we please him.

And so this is what Paul starts to explain.  
 One thing to notice: the Athenians lived in a city of many idols,  
 But Paul only speaks of one God, Verse 24  
 The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth  
 Verse 25 And he is not served by human hands  
 Verse 28 In him we live and move and have our being  
 Verse 31 He has set a day when he will judge

Paul speaks of God in the singular all the way through this speech of his,  
 which was a big point of difference to what the Athenians believed.  
 And it's different to the beliefs of many of our neighbours here in Hornsby.  
 How many Gods does the Hindu religion speak of?  
 It's in the many many millions!  
 It seems to me much easier to deal with one God than to deal with millions.

And if there is only one God,  
 then he is the God of our neighbours even if they don't recognize it.  
 Verse 28 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth;  
 and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God  
 did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he  
 is not far from any one of us.

You can start to see how the things we believe have flow on effects.  
 If we do believe in one God who is everyone's God,  
 then you see why mission and evangelism is important.  
 People need to know about the God who made them

and what it is he wants from them, **God** commands all people everywhere to repent—Paul tells us in verse 30—“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.”

What God wants is for us to turn away from our sins,  
     to turn away from our practice of living for ourselves,  
     of ignoring God and his expectations,  
 and to live in recognition that Jesus will be our judge.

This might sound exclusive and intolerant,  
     but if there is only one God,  
     then it makes sense that he calls everyone’s attention to him and to him alone.

If you were writing a series of fantasy novels where you had to invent your own God,  
 you might think of God differently.

You might make God to be less insistent on his own glory.

But one of the things that Paul reminds us of here  
 is that the God we worship *has not been invented by human imaginations*.

We’re told in verse 24 that He does not live in temples built by human hands

And in verse 29 we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—  
 an image made by human design and skill.

And thank goodness for that,

because if it were up to us to invent God

then he’d just be a reflection of our own prejudices and issues.

No, we must accept God as he comes to us,

as the one and only God who demands our faith and allegiance.

So the faith we profess in the Creed is different to Hinduism—one God, not many—  
 but so far what we’ve seen isn’t uniquely Christian.

Muslims believe in one God who demands our repentance,

Islam itself means ‘submission’; it teaches we are to submit to God,

Islam even teaches that Jesus will be our judge!

So what’s different about God as we Christians understand him?

Well, when we say the Creed we’re not only saying that we believe in God,  
     We’re saying that we believe in God the *Father* Almighty

The reason we know the God of the Creed is real

is because he has come to us and shown us what he is like;

God has acted in history

    and people have written those events down

    so others can know and believe.

During the Exodus,

    God demonstrated his power in front of the Israelites and the Egyptians,  
     and Moses wrote it down.

Most significantly, God appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.

At the end of his speech in Athens Paul briefly mentions the importance of Christ's life when it comes to being sure about God.

He says that God presented proof of the coming judgment to everyone by raising Jesus from the dead.

And the resurrected Christ was seen by many people and those appearances were described and written down for us.

And so we look to the life of Jesus as a trustworthy source for our knowledge of God.

And one of the most significant things we are taught by Jesus is that God is our *Father*.

Have a listen to Matthew 11:27, from our first reading. Jesus says

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

It's with the ministry of Jesus that we come to understand that the one God is made up of three persons.

We have the Father and the Son, and elsewhere in the Gospels.

Jesus will teach us about the Spirit as well: One God in three persons.

This is one of the big differences between Christianity and Islam.

Muslims believe that Allah is one God, one person.

But through the ministry of Christ

God revealed himself to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We don't worship the same God as the Muslims,

God is actually a very different being to what Islam suggests.

And it's significant that the first of these persons is someone we can know as *Father*.

Our God is not simply a powerful force that demands our attention, but he is a personal figure who, although powerful,

is also protective, affectionate, attentive, generous;

all the things that you would want *your own* father to be,

all the things that *you* would want to be as a father or parent.

Speaking of God as Father is a bit risky because

sometimes our human fathers are not great people;

but the Fatherhood of God is perfect,

and is one of the greatest reasons we have to worship him.

The Gospel of Matthew is a great resource to discover the nature of God as Father.

In ch 6, v 31 do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well

And then in ch 7, v 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

As our Father, God is our provider, and he provides us with good things!

And the Creed says that he is our Father *Almighty*,  
a father who has the power to come good on his promise.  
The reason he can fulfill his promises is because of what's next in the Creed:  
he is the *creator of heaven and earth*.

We were reminded of this fact by Paul in our Acts reading, weren't we?

Acts 17, v 24 The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth, and then in v 25 he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

When the Psalmists reflect on God's role as creator,  
they see this aspect of God's character as motivation to lean on him for help.

Psalm 121, vs 1 and 2: I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

When you have access to the creator, then no problem is insurmountable.

There's a great story from the world of IT,  
which tells of the time Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft,  
was touring a new call-centre that was his company was opening.  
He walked past a cubical and asked the help desk operator  
whether he could have a go at taking the call.  
So he put on the headset and taking a call he introduced himself as William.  
The person stated their problem and William helped them resolve it.  
He did so well that when the person rang back again  
they specifically asked for "that nice young man, William"!

Now I feel a little uneasy comparing Bill gates with God,  
but in terms of Microsoft he is the creator,  
and so you would expect him to be able to deal with the problems that arise.  
The trouble was his time on the help desk was a one off.  
But the Christian faith teaches us  
that the creator of our world is always able to help,  
And that he wants to help, because he is our *Father*.

The creed isn't just full of facts to learn, these are truths to act upon.

So let's call upon the Father Almighty right now,  
inviting him to act as the creator of heaven and Earth.

Father, We wish to worship and trust as the one true God, repent of actions that deny this reality, but we also call upon you as our Father Almighty. We seek your blessing and provision, we ask for your help as the creator of heaven and earth. We thank you that in Christ we become your children and so we can ask these things of you Father. And its in his name we pray, Amen.

[Alternate ending: food pyramid has changed, the 'creed' for nutrition is different!  
Our christian creed doesn't change, nor would we want it too, because its too good a  
thing for God to be our Father Almighty].