

Lord, you have blessed us with open minds and inquiring hearts. We ask that your Spirit will move within and among us today as we contemplate the possibilities contained in the words, "I believe." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Over the past few weeks, albeit with interruptions, we've been working our way phrase by phrase through the Apostles' Creed (hoping that you read the third and final section somehow this week, since we canceled our service last Sunday), suggesting reasons for its composition and outlining some of the thinking behind its rather terse and unadorned language. But what has always struck me about the Apostle's Creed is not what it says, but what it **doesn't** say. It speaks not a word about the teachings of Jesus, for example - and the silence on this point is deafening. In view of this rather profound omission, it seems safe to conclude that the writers of the Creed thought that the essence of faith lies not in what Jesus taught, but in **who he was**. So the emphasis of the Creed is *not* meant to be ethical in nature, but theological - focused not on what Jesus said we should or should not do, but rather on the relationship between God, the created order, and humankind. In fact, the only action demanded of Christians in the Creed seems to be a **deep trust** in God - and so perhaps it's **inferred** that right behaviour follows from that deep trust.

I've always felt the lack of such statements about Jesus keenly, though - perhaps you have as well - and one year in seminary we were challenged to write our own personal creed, and then defend it. When it came to saying what I had to say about Jesus, I found I had to fill that void, so out came a few statements outlining what Jesus was all about during his earthly ministry.

And this is what I said: *"Jesus taught the present reality of God's Kingdom, affirmed the value and dignity of all people, and promoted personal and social transformation through right relationship with God."* Not terribly profound, I admit, but it was a start.

Now some among us may be rather horrified that seminarians would be given licence to tamper with one of our traditional building blocks in this fashion, but in fact, it was a helpful exercise. As another one of our professors said, and as I've also passed along, the Creed is best understood as a **starting** point for theological reflection, not an **end** point: a synopsis, if you will, but not the whole story. Thinking about it a different way, if we imagine our faith as a banquet of different tastes and experiences, then the Creed is best thought of as an appetizer that teases our palate and makes us hungry for more.

In the course of doing research for this Lenten series, one of the books I happened upon was a statement of faith written by R. R. Williams, a bishop in the English church. In it, he talks about how people come to faith - how we all have different starting points, and different experiences that lead us to some internalized understanding of what the essentials of faith are for us. And

he makes the point that the words of the Creed are not necessarily the words and phrases that can sum it up into something short, crisp, and challenging. Indeed if he was asked to articulate his own personal faith in a limited number of words, this is what he would offer: *“I trust in, and seek to obey, God, who is made real to me in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, present in the Church, active in the world, always calling me to closer discipleship, as he called and re-called his disciples while on earth. Because he represents so fully ‘the mind of God’ I can say ‘all things were made by him’, and because God’s purpose is wrapped up in him, I can say ‘His Kingdom shall have no end.’”*¹

Other affirmations of faith abound, and several have emerged from the work of the Wild Goose Worship Group, which creates the liturgical texts used in the Iona Community in Scotland. One of the ones that makes a helpful connection between faith and action reads like this: *“We believe in God whose love is the source of all life and the desire of our lives, whose love was given a human face in Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was crucified by the evil that waits to enslave us all, and whose love, defeating even death, is our glorious promise of freedom. Therefore, though we are sometimes fearful and full of doubt, in God we trust; and in the name of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves, in the service of others, to seek justice and to live in peace, to care for the earth and to share the commonwealth of God’s goodness, to live in the freedom of forgiveness and the power of the spirit of love, and in the company of the faithful, so to be the Church for the glory of God.”*²

My goal this Lent was to invite us into a deeper walk of faith by taking a fresh look at the Apostle’s Creed, by opening it up and letting its ancient phrases speak to each of us with some new energy and insight. Benedictine nun and author Joan Chittister has this to say about it: *“The Creed is not an index of dogmas, although it has often been presented as that. It is, more, a catalogue of choices, an inventory of possibilities, a roster of visions.”*³

I firmly believe that God is honoured when we actively seek understanding, when we question, when we struggle, and yes, even when we doubt. The longer we live, the more we realize that all is mystery. As human beings, we hold honesty as a primary value in our interpersonal relationships, and I suspect that God wants no less from us; and in this season of Lent, in which we are challenged to see more clearly, God invites us to take those two wonderful words, *I believe*, and to fill in the rest. God’s richest blessings on this holy journey.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ R. R. Williams. *Faith and the Faith*, Mowbray’s, 1973.

² *The Iona Community Worship Book*, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, UK., 2001. p. 75.

³ Joan Chittister. *In Search of Belief*, Luguori Publications, 1999. p. 198.

