

Sermon -- 07/24/22
(The Creed)

Text -- Psalm 136:1

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever.

Theme -- “Who Is God?”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week’s sermon was entitled “*Who Am I?*” and it dealt with how the commandments answer that question: we are sinners, plain and simple. But sinners who have been forgiven by Christ crucified, and who now strive to live under those commandments, being the people God intends us to be. Showing His love and mercy. Being reflections — however pale and dim and weak — of our Lord Jesus.

Today we move to the next part of the Catechism — the Creed — and examine its answer to the question of “*Who Is God?*” (pause)

The first thing one notices about the Creed is that it is easily divided into three parts, or articles. The First Article (“**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth**”) is quite short and to the point. It says that we believe that God is the Creator of all things. It brings us right back to Genesis, where we hear that God made all things. And while it is primarily the Father of whom we think when we talk about creation, we need to be aware that the Bible also says the Son and the Holy Spirit are also active in creation. For example, in Job 33, we hear Job’s friend Elihu say that it was the Spirit who made him and gave him life. And we also recall those famous words from St. John’s Gospel about Jesus, the Son:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.

And so we see that all three Persons of the Trinity are involved in creation -- in fact, all three Persons are involved in ALL the works confessed in the Creed: creation, redemption, and sanctification.

But the main point that this First Article wants to make is that God is the Creator of all. And we shouldn't think that creation was a one-time event that took place long ago and is now over. It isn't, not by a long shot. God STILL continues to create, now and throughout eternity. In the beginning God created out of nothing -- He simply said, "*Let there be...*" and it was. But in His creation today, God creates through means. For example, God creates every new child through its parents -- it is not just some automatic occurrence of nature which brings about the existence of that baby. Rather, it is God creating through those parents, using them as His agents. Every blade of grass, every ray of sunshine, every drop of rain, then, are examples of God's continuing creation.

Luther, in his explanation of the First Article and creation, says:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me...all my members...all my senses and still preserves them....That He richly and daily provides me with all I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil...

So under the concept of creation Luther includes making each of us, giving us all we have, providing for all our needs, as well as daily defending us against harm and evil. You see, then, that confessing God to be Creator is not just saying something about the long-distant past, but is also a confession of faith in Him to provide for our needs in the present AND the future! (pause)

The Second Article of the Creed is what really distinguishes us as Christians. Non-Christians can say that they believe in God as Creator, but only Christians can confess that God (in the Person of Christ Jesus) is their Savior. And how is He our Savior? He is our Savior because He was **conceived** and **born** for us; because He **suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried** for us; because He **descended into hell** for us; because He **rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at God's right hand** for us; and because He will **return to be our Judge**. Those are things that only God can do for us, and so in Christ we truly see God-for-us.

Jesus was **conceived** by the Holy Spirit and **born** of the virgin Mary. Here we confess that Jesus is both true God and true man, and that BOTH His divine and human natures were required in order to save us. His

divine nature, because only God could save fallen and sinful mankind; only God's own Self-Sacrifice could pay the debt for all the sin of the entire human race. And His human nature was needed because only by taking on our flesh and blood could the Son take our place under the Law to fulfill it for us; only by being human could He die the death of the cross in order to suffer the punishment for our sins.

Next we confess that Jesus **suffered** for us -- just think for a moment about the terrible agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus sweated great like blood, knowing full well what He was about to endure the following day on the cross. Remember the trials before Pilate and Herod, when He was accused of all manner of sin, when He was tempted to deny who He was and why He had come. Imagine the pain of scourging, the humiliation of being mocked, the sorrow of desertion by those He loved, the horror of the death sentence. Certainly Jesus suffered for us. But His greatest suffering was yet to come.

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried we confess. There on the cross was Jesus' most difficult test and His greatest suffering. For there He was subjected to the full force of God's wrath and judgment on all the sins of the whole human race -- paying the price for every last sin ever committed by every person who will ever exist. And He had to endure that punishment alone, deserted and forsaken even by His own heavenly Father. How easily those words just roll off our tongues: **"...suffered for us under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried"**! But not one of us can begin to imagine what those words really mean, all they really cost. Those words describe God Himself suffering hell for the sins of His rebel creatures! Your sins and mine nailed Him to that cross. It was to buy back such lowly sinners as you and I that Jesus was willing -- even eager -- to suffer all this. The cross is the greatest marvel in the entire universe, and yet we all too often seem to be unmoved by it, and to take it for granted.

Jesus **descended into hell** and then **rose on the third day**. The descent into hell, though, is not to be understood as part of Jesus' suffering. Rather, Jesus went into hell as the Victor over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus went right into the devil's own place and proved to him that He had defeated those forces which had

enslaved and tormented mankind. By descending into hell and then leaving it, Jesus showed that the devil had no power over Him -- nor any longer over us who trust in Him because Jesus had once-and-for-all paid the price for our salvation. We belong to GOD, bought back at the cost of Christ's own suffering and death. And then on the third day (Easter) Jesus rose from the dead to prove the same thing to us human beings. In His resurrection, we have the assurance that Jesus has indeed fully paid for our sins. In His resurrection, Jesus shows us what He had earlier proclaimed to the devil in the descent to hell: that He is the Victor over sin, death, and the devil. And in His resurrection, Jesus reminds us that we too will be raised from the dead on the last Day.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. When we confess those words, we are saying that Jesus went to heaven, not just because that's where he came from, but also because He rules all things for the good of us, His Church. "*The right hand of God*" is not to be understood as a place or locality (like Crookston or Minneapolis or Target Field), but rather as a statement of Jesus' power and authority to rule the universe. And in His ascension and rule, we are given the promise that one day we too will be brought into heaven — that we too will be privileged to rule along with God Himself.

What a great promise we have here, but do we act and live as if we truly believed it? Many times we live as if God has forgotten about us, as if we were all alone against the forces of this world. But in Jesus' ascension and rule we have the assurance that God has NOT forgotten us, but that in fact He orders all things to the benefit of His people. We may not always understand how God does that -- or even see it -- but we are cheered by the promise and hope given us in those words "*ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*". (pause)

And finally, we confess that Jesus will **return** to be our Judge. Now, for some people, the word "Judge" has a negative -- even frightening -- ring to it. It conjures up the image of a trial and of accusations and punishment. But for us Christians, we know that we have nothing to fear from this Judge. After all, He has already endured our sentence for us, and has therefore declared us "not guilty". But for all those who do not

trust in the mercy and forgiveness of this Judge, there IS a great reason to fear. That's why we need to reach out to them with the Gospel message that Jesus — their Judge — is also their Savior. It's only through that message that anyone can hope to be saved. (pause)

Now after saying all that we have about how Jesus is our Savior, our Redeemer, I suppose some might be wondering how I could say earlier that all three Persons of the Trinity are responsible for our redemption. Am I saying that somehow the Father and the Holy Spirit also were conceived, born, suffered, crucified, died, buried, and so on? Of course not. In all those things it was Christ alone who redeemed us. But remember John 3:16 (*"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son..."*): the Son, Jesus Christ, came to be our Savior only because the Father **sent** Him. And then think of what we have already confessed in the Creed -- that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And remember that elsewhere in Scripture we are told that Jesus completed His work by the power of the Holy Spirit. So it is in those ways that we can truthfully say that the Father and the Spirit also participate in the work of redemption. (pause)

In the Third Article we hear about the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who converts people, making them part of the holy Christian Church. It is the Holy Spirit who joins us into the communion of saints and who gives us the forgiveness of sins. It is the Holy Spirit who keeps us in the Church by sustaining us in the Christian faith as the Gospel is applied to us in Word and Sacrament. And on the Last Day, it will be the Holy Spirit who raises us from the grave and brings us into eternal life.

What a long, detailed list of things the Holy Spirit does for us! To those who accuse our Lutheran church of not giving enough credit to the Holy Spirit, or of not focusing on His work and His gifts, what more can we say? What more can someone ask of the Holy Spirit than to **make** us Christians; to **keep** us Christians; to **forgive** us daily through the Means of Grace; to **raise** us up on the Last Day and to **bring** us into heaven?

And yet we also remember that the Holy Spirit works among us only because the Father and the Son have sent Him to us, as Jesus says in John 14:

...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

And so, again, we see that it is the Trinity who is our Sanctifier (that is, the One who makes us holy and righteous in His sight by applying the work of the Son to us) as well as being our Creator and our Redeemer.

(pause)

So often these days, people seem to have absolutely no idea just who God is, or what He does for us, or why we are to worship him. Well, the answer to all those questions is right here for us, in the Creed. The Creed is not just something we mumble through on Sunday morning, and then leave behind here in church. In the Creed God has given us a beautiful, clear, and simple statement of who He is -- our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier -- and that He has done all these things for us simply because He loves us and wants us to be with Him forever in heaven. May God bless each of us to out into the world and make bold confession of our faith, using the Creed as our guide.

Let's close today's sermon, then, with prayer:

O Blessed Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank You for being our creating, redeeming, and sanctifying God. We thank You for giving us the Creed as an explanation of You and Your saving love for us. Grant us always a firm faith in its teachings and make us bold confessors of its truths in our lives. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed -- "*How Great Thou Art*" (LSB #801)

OS -- Offertory/Farewell & Godspeed to Vicar-Elect

FE -- Offertory/Prayers