

Acts 8:14–17 and Luke 3:15–17,21–22

I believe in the Holy Spirit

I know vs. I believe

Well today is my last day on the job. It's been a joy and honour to serve this parish for the last 5 ½ years but I must confess there have been highs and lows in my time here and I haven't always been stoked to be here.

One of those times was on my first day at St John's. I walked into the old admin building and asked Judy where I would work? She pointed to the old rectory across the carpark and gave me some keys. So I dutifully trooped across the carpark and opened the door to my new office. To my horror I walked into a cupboard. There were shelves, a window but nothing else. No desk, no fan, not even a chair.

I stood there and imagined ministering out of this tiny space. Finally, I worked up the courage to troop back across the carpark to Judy's much bigger office to see if there'd been a mistake. Judy was naturally shocked that I was being so ungrateful. So I asked her to come with me and show me where I was supposed to work.

When we got back to my door, Judy walked through it then unlatched another door at the back, opening the way to... the rest of the office. What I thought was my office was a cloakroom. There was of course a spacious office with a desk, fan, huge bookcases, and plenty of space for pastoral meetings; anything I could think of! We both chuckled and later I discovered my office opened to a whole house with a kitchen, two bathrooms, seven rooms, and a giant hallway.

Now I tell you this story because this is what the apostle's creed is like. We don't believe 'in' the Creed, we believe in God. The creed is like a doorway into the Christian faith and there's so much more to discover and enjoy.

This is one of the reasons why we say, 'I believe' instead of 'I know'. While I know God exists, knowing something doesn't imply action. I can know that smoking is bad for me, but until I believe I need to quit smoking, it's just head knowledge. When I believe something in my heart, I'm taking the first steps towards acting upon it.

When we say, 'I believe'. We're declaring to the world, to ourselves, and to God Almighty that this is something I'm ready to walk into, I'm committed to, we believe.

- **I believe in the Holy Spirit**

Today we're unpacking the last stanza of the Apostle's Creed which begins:

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Now when I read this earlier in the week, I wondered if the Holy Spirit got a bit short changed. The Father gets two lines, Jesus the Son gets 5, but Holy Spirit only gets one!

Thankfully JI Packer set me straight in his book on the Creed and helped me realise that the last five lines and all revolve around Holy Spirit's work.

Look with me at Luke 3. Here we see how John called people to turn from sin toward God and when they thought he was the Saviour of the world, he says in. v.16:

"I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Luke 3:16)

John believed in the Holy Spirit. He knew that his work was just the warm-up for the main show.

Then, suddenly Jesus comes on the scene and asks John to baptise him. John doesn't think he's worthy, but Jesus insists, and Luke tells us that:

"as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

There you have it folks: The Father speaks love over his praying Son, as the Holy Spirit swoops in to empower Him for mission. This glorious trinitarian moment is why we must write the Creed on our hearts. It pricks our conscience and reminds us who we serve.

But wait there's more! Holy Spirit power wasn't just for Jesus, it's for us today!

- **The (One) holy catholic (and Apostolic) Church**

This is where we need to recognise that the Holy Spirit fills, sanctifies, and unites the church today.

The next line of the Apostle's Creed says that we believe in the:

Holy catholic church.

Holy means 'set apart'. The church isn't a building or an organisation, it's one living body of holy people. We're not holy because of our actions, we've been made holy by the grace of God, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and filled with the Spirit's power at baptism.

We're also little 'c' catholics. Catholicos in Latin means universal or worldwide. It doesn't mean we're Roman Catholics. As Anglicans we kicked ourselves out of that organisation when the protestant reformers rejected the authority of the pope 400 years ago. Yet as Anglicans we never left Jesus' worldwide church because he is our true head.

As Anglicans we also believe we're members of the movement started by Jesus first apostles. We're an 'apostolic church'. After Jesus's death and resurrection, he sent his mates out into the world to make disciples of every nation, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are one in the Spirit and He calls us to follow the Apostle's teaching.

- **The communion of saints,**

We see the glory of this in Acts 8 where a great persecution scatters Jesus first followers from Jerusalem out into the world. A disciple called Phillip flees to Samaria where he tells people about Jesus and people are baptised in Jesus' name.

Acts 8:14 says that:

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.” (Acts 8:14)

The word *communio* comes from the Latin word for sharing or participation. Notice how the apostles didn't leave the Samaritans to figure out their faith by themselves! Instead, they sent their best guys, Jesus' mates Peter and John to help them grow in holiness.

v.15 tells us that:

“When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 8:15–16)

These new disciples were trying to follow Jesus without Holy Spirit power. He was missing from their lives, so Peter and John pray for them and Holy Spirit enters their hearts. They become part of the community of God's holy people and He equips them for mission.

In my first year at St John's/Maraget's we did a whole preaching series on how every Christian is a saint, made Holy by Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross.

- **The forgiveness of sins**

This is why we believe in forgiveness of sins. Jesus' death has made a way for sinners like you and me to be forgiven.

As 1 John 3:4 says: “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4)

It's breaking God's law. It's any action I take in defiance of God's good will and purpose for my life. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God in thought, word, deed, and in what we have failed to do. So how can sinners possibly be part of the communion of saints we just said we believed in?

Well, forgiveness involves sacrifice to bring about atonement. When I break a road rule, I must pay a fine to cover my debt to society. Sadly, my debt to God is greater than I can afford. Thankfully Jesus paid that price on the cross.

I owed a debt I couldn't pay; he paid a debt he didn't owe.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, Christ pays for it on the cross, and the Father adopts us as his own. I believe this, I receive this, and the Holy Spirit gives me the power to share this forgiveness with the world.

- **The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen!**

Now if this weren't glorious enough the Creed has one more truth to remind us of and that's resurrection life!

While Jesus died to pay our debt, he didn't stay dead, instead he rose again to eternal life. Strangely the Bible tells us how his friends often didn't recognise Jesus when he returned to life. In his resurrection body Jesus ate, drank, and hugged his friends, but he could also appear in locked rooms, instantly travel great distances, and most importantly he enjoyed perfect health and could not die.

When I recite the creed, I'm claiming resurrection life for myself. By the grace of God, the cross of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit I believe that while my earthly body will wear out and die, when Christ returns, I will be given a resurrection body like Jesus and will live forever with Him.

Friends this is great and glorious news. This Creed isn't just a boring summary of doctrines, it's a crystallisation of the most wonderful realities about who God is, who we are in Christ, and how the Holy Spirit is working all things together for our good.

That's why although we're sad to leave, I believe we must go. God called our family to Dalby Parish to serve. Now we're being called out to continue his mission elsewhere.

The good news is that God is still in control, Jesus is still the head of our church, and you are still temples of the Holy Spirit, equipped with all you need to serve the Lord with gladness.

May we press forward in faith knowing that in Christ the best is yet to come.

David Livingstone story:

Robert Moffat (preacher, Scotland/ South Africa)

'Every morning when I get up and look at the horizon, I see the smoke from a thousand villages where the name of Christ has never been heard.'

David Livingstone

29,000 miles, million square miles of ministry

14 January 1856, Chief, 47 warriors

Prayer journal

Who will go, who will pray, who will go?

