

We believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

So begins the Apostle's Creed which has been the basis for judging truth from heresy for over 1,800 years. I know many of you are unaccustomed to creeds, but in the church I grew up in, we recited a creed every Sunday.

The Apostle's Creed is not merely a list of doctrines but is a statement of faith. Each phrase begins with "We believe." Saying the creed with a sincere heart requires faith in the God who has accomplished these great things.

Because we come from various backgrounds, there will be issues of Christian doctrine on which we will not agree. I believe that is a good and powerful thing for it gives us the opportunity to understand our faith from a larger perspective. To claim that you can't learn from another sister or brother in the faith because they don't agree with you, is the height of arrogance. However, there are some doctrines which are foundational, things we must agree on if we are to call ourselves Christians. I believe these foundational doctrines are outlined in the Apostle's Creed. For our next several meetings we will be looking at the doctrines which are laid out in it.

Today, we start with the first phrase: We believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Yesterday, we talked about the doctrine of the Trinity. We saw that God is one. This one God is known in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our focus for today is on the first person of the Trinity, the Father.

1 Corinthians 8:6 says in part, "There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live." For most Christians, when they speak about God, they are really referring to God the Father and rightly so, since God has been understood as Father for thousands of years.

The ancient Hebrews spoke of God as Father. Psalms 103:13 says, "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him." God speaking through the prophet says in Jeremiah 31:9, "I am Israel's father, and Israel is my firstborn son."

Today, I want to talk about four characteristics of God the Father.

The first is God the Father as creator.

The ancient understanding of God as “Father” is linked to God as creator. In the Scriptures, God is the author of life, the maker of all things. The prophet Isaiah writes, “Yet, Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). These words reflect back to the book of Genesis, where God creates human beings from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). The Father breathes life, giving form and shape to our bodies and souls.

Many people get hung up on the creation story because they approach Genesis 1 and 2 with the wrong question. Many people look at the creation story and ask the question “How did God create the heavens and the earth?” I don’t believe that the Bible’s primary purpose is to answer the how question, but rather the who and why questions. When we read Genesis 1 and 2, we should ask, “Who created the heavens and the earth” and “Why did God create all that is? That second question leads us to a much deeper understanding.

It means that if God created everything for a purpose, then you and every person who has, or is or will live must have a purpose as well. In a way, God has written you into his story, a story which began at creation, then your story will only make sense in light of God’s story. The story of your life has to be more than getting an education, raising a family, working and having fun. When you believe that God the Father is the maker of all things, it changes how you live your life. You no longer have to drift from one thing to another. You can live with confidence and purpose. Because the one who created your life also gives us in new life.

Since the advent of sin, the coming of brokenness into the world, God the Father has been and continues to work to restore us to life. The Father says, “I will be your father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Becoming a Christian is about turning away from whatever or whoever you are ultimately living for and turning to the Maker of heaven and earth as your God and King and Father.

We have, by virtue of our creation and re-creation in grace, been adopted by our Heavenly Father. The first gift of creation was followed by a second gift of re-creation: redemption, that is the forgiveness of our sins.

Creation and re-creation show us how much the Father loves us, calling us his sons and daughters. We come to know God as the Father of all people when we know him as Creator. God becomes our spiritual father by grace, bestowing on us a new life when we turn to him in faith. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ, has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun."

In this new life, we as the Father's children are not far from God. Several years ago, there was a popular song in the USA that went like this:

God is watching us
God is watching us
God is watching us from a distance

The song had a beautiful melody, but it is very bad theology.

God is not a distant deity that simply sits back and watches what is happening. Rather, God is our Father who is actively involved with our lives. Therefore, we can approach God with the confidence of sons and daughters for we know him as our Creator.

God the Father is also our provider.

There are at least 169 verses in the Bible that refer to the ways God provides for us. Philippians 4:19 puts it simply: "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." While prosperity preachers might teach that God's provision is always about more money or more possessions which miraculously appear, we should take a closer look at what God desires to provide for us.

Like any good parent, God would never give us what He knows would harm us. His intent is to help us develop Christlikeness so that we become salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13–14). God does not want us to see Him as a heavenly source of mere material possessions. Acquiring things is not the purpose for which we were created. Luke 12:15 says "Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

God knows what we need and what we want. Often those are not the same.

Some, however, would point to Psalm 37:4 to prove that God supplies our wants and well as our needs. After all, Psalm 37:4 says, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." That is a prime example of how a Bible verse when taken out of context can be used to prove almost anything. When you read all of Psalm 37 you will see that "the desires of your heart" refers to a restoration of righteousness, and not physical possessions.

God distinguishes between our needs and our wants because he knows that where our hearts are at. He wants us to remember that this world is not our home and that part of what we need is to shift our focus to eternal life while still living this one.

God is concerned with every part of our being: spirit, soul, and body and he promises to meet our needs in ways that are beyond our imagining. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

We can trust the Father's goodness, guidance, and lovingkindness to do more for us than we could ever achieve on our own. As we live in faith, we develop an attitude like David's, who said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," or as the New Living Translation puts it, "I have all that I need," (Psalm 23:1)

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches His disciples to ask for our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11). Further on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about food or clothing. The Father knows our needs. (Matthew 6:24-25)

Many passages about the Father's provision relate to our need for food and clothing and the daily, physical needs of life. Others refer to the needs of our inner being. God provides us with peace (John 14:27), comfort (2 Corinthians 1:4), and "power, love and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). In fact, He "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). In whatever physical state we find

ourselves, we can be content in the Lord (Philippians 4:12), for we know God the Father as our provider.

The third characteristic we can see of God the Father is his goodness. God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

As every good parent wants the best for his or her sons and daughters, God the Father gives us every good gift imaginable. Jesus said, "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him." (Matthew 7:11).

I have four grandchildren. They are my pride and joy. I would do anything for them. You are the Father's pride and joy, and he would do anything for you. Indeed, he made the greatest sacrifice of all by sending his one and only Son into the world for you.

We don't have to wonder if our Heavenly Father will do the right thing for us. Consider what St. Paul told the Romans, "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (Rom. 8:32). With such a father, nothing is too great, nothing is too much for his goodness, mercy, and love!

Fourthly God the Father is faithful.

My favorite hymn is "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." The chorus which is based on Lamentations 3:22-23 goes like this:

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

All too often families are left wounded and broken by a human father who runs away or otherwise betrays. But God the Father is perfect in faithfulness and abiding loyalty.

The faithfulness of God the Father means the Father is unchanging in his nature, as he has been, forever will he be. The Father is true to his Word, has promised salvation to his people, and will keep his promises forever. He is worthy of eternal trust no matter how unlikely his promises seem. Nothing in heaven or on earth can prevent God from accomplishing all that

he has promised his people through Jesus Christ. This reliability of God should be a great source of comfort and strength for God's people as they repeatedly fail and go through trials and suffering.

I want to close with a quick story of the Father's faithfulness to me. Thirty-one years ago, I was diagnosed with a very rare disease called acromegaly. Because of that disease, I have had nine surgeries, including two brain surgeries, replacing both of my hip joints, both of my shoulders and one knee. I have undergone hundreds of medical tests and for many years suffered physical pain because of it.

Julie, my wife said to me just the other night that she didn't know how I could go through all I've been through. I know it is only by the faithfulness of God that I did. A little over a year ago, I was back at the doctor's clinic for a checkup. There were more tests and a meeting with the doctor. The doctor looked at all the test results and pronounced me cured. I will always remember what he wrote on my discharge form, "Thirty years and done!"

All I could do at that point is to praise God. I did do a joyful little dance in the hallway as I was leaving the clinic.

I don't know why I had to go through all of that, but I can't imagine doing it without the knowledge that God was by my side.

Believing in God the Father, almighty provides us with the strength, comfort and peace we need to overcome whatever life throws at us.