

**SIZING-UP GOD**  
*First the series: The Need For Creed*

**Texts: Jer. 27:1-7; Matt. 6:5-14**

**1/17/10**

**Introduction**

Last Sunday as my flight from Pittsburgh touched down on the runway in Atlanta the familiar announcement of the Flight Attendant came over the speaker: *Welcome to Atlanta. Thank you for flying US Airways. We look forward to serving you in the future.*

It's what she said next that got my attention: *Be sure to practice good Karma in 2010.* Good karma? That was a first. She might have been saying, "have a good day" in a trendy way. Karma has become an "in" word in the same way crosses have become popular jewelry.

But suppose she really believes in the divine order of Karma – the law of cause and effect in which each individual creates their own destiny by their thoughts words, and deeds. Does holding that Hindu belief make any difference?

Does it matter that an observant Jew each day prays with great faithfulness, *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength?*

Does it change anything that a billion or so Muslims confess on a regular basis that, *There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet?*

How important is it that two billion or so Christians gather with their brothers and sisters and recite, *I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth?*

And what does it matter that the neighborhood atheist looks out the window and says to him or herself, *All of it such a crock; the world would be a better place without religion?*

That which we say defines us, that to which we give our hearts is our "creed" which coming from the Latin word "credo" means "I believe." But how important is what I believe?

- 1. We Christians have a creed, many in fact. But we privilege one or two. Most weeks with millions of Christians around the world we recite the Apostles' Creed. For a number of weeks I want us to look at that creed, line by line, in an effort to answer the question "so what?" Does it matter that week by week that we "affirm our faith using the Apostles' Creed"? Do I understand it well enough to answer the question?**

Let me back up so I can go forward. As a pastor I would like to give every Christian three things to which they can anchor their faith.

The first block is "the prayer", the Lord's Prayer. To know and pray the Lord's Prayer is to practice our spirituality. It answers the question "Who shall I trust with my life and my future?"

The second block is the "Ten Commandments." To know and do the commandments is to practice our ethics. It answers the question, "How shall I live a good life?"

And the third block is the "Creed". You won't find it in the Bible. It is a summary of the teaching of the Apostles. Since the fourth century Christians have recited it, mainly at their baptisms. It answers the question, "What shall I believe about God?"

Honestly, creeds have fallen on hard times. They aren't cool. The Apostles' Creed can become the great yawner in the order of worship. We live in a world where folks are more impressed with experiences of God, than statements of belief about God. The word is relativism. For most people religious beliefs are like ice cream preferences – I like Butter Pecan, you like Rocky Road, it doesn't make much sense arguing about which one is better. It just doesn't matter.

But maybe it does matter. If you are waking up in Haiti today, does it matter what you believe about God? What kind of God allows such things to happen?

If you've been betrayed by a friend or hurt by a loved one, does it matter what you believe about God? How shall I respond?

If your children hassled you on the way to church this morning, or you had a week that is best forgotten, perhaps you need a faith that is more stable than how you feel at this moment.

Maybe we need a God who amounts to a little more than a scoop of Rocky Road or Butter Pecan. We have a need for creed.

- 2. To confess the Apostles' Creed is to begin with these words: I believe in God, the Father Almighty... Now it is no great trick to believe in God. Most people have; and if the polls are to be believed most people do. But it gets interesting when we get around to describing the God it is in whom we believe.**

Christians do not believe in a plain vanilla God. The God of the creed is not the faceless God of the Gallop Poll. We say that God is "Father". And we are in trouble already.

How is God my Father, and do I want him to be? Is God simply my image of maleness blown up to the size of a parade float? To say "Father" for some is to confess warmth or protection or presence. For others it conjures up feelings distance or abuse or absence.

To confess God the Father in the creed isn't to confess the best or worst about the male gender you can imagine. It is first to believe in one who is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, in a way different than God is the Father of anyone else. God has a unique relationship with Jesus by creation, through trust, and with intimacy. God is Father.

Jesus invites us to get the picture. God is like the Father of a prodigal child whose love overwhelms his dignity as he rushes to welcome home one who didn't deserve much of a welcome at all. The Father of Jesus Christ is not distant, absent, or abusive.

And the Apostle Paul tells us that we can become God's "adopted children" (Eph. 1:5) through faith in Jesus Christ. We can come to know something of what Jesus knows himself. So much so that when offer our prayers we are not simply talking to his Father, but addressing our Father. "This then," says Jesus, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name...'

The creed is telling us that on the best and worst day of our lives when we look up into the night sky we sense the fingerprints of a God who is not an impersonal force but an intimate presence. We do not confess a God who wound up the world and let it go. Or a God who is simply one with the sunset, ocean, or the view from the golf course. We name a God with us and beyond us- who can be known, served, and loved.

I believe in God the Father... Not because it is always obvious at 11:15 on Sunday morning, but because it is true. And on those days when the Fatherhood of God is anything but obvious, the creed reminds us that millions of people, from countless

places, for more than a thousand years have said it is so. And in a sense they believe it for me until I can believe it again.

### **3. That's not all the creed says about this God. The Father is a "Father, Almighty". Intimacy meets power.**

How is God powerful? It's a pressing question today. Where was God when the earth shook under Haiti on Tuesday and thousands died? Was God incapable of stopping an earthquake, and simply grieves with us over the misery of the place. Was God capable, but for some reason wasn't willing? Is there something else that needs to be said? I think the answer matters for the kind of lives we choose to live.

People in Jeremiah's time were wondering. Wouldn't an "almighty" God want to free his people from their Babylonian captivity under King Nebuchadnezzar? Surely if we revolt at an opportune time God will insure our success.

Jeremiah tells the leaders of the potential rebellion that God is "almighty" (NIV) in verse 4 of chapter 27:

*With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.*

Sounds pretty "almighty" to me. But then Jeremiah heads in a direction most weren't expecting:

*Now I will hand over all your countries to my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; I will even make the wild animals obey him. (vs. 6)*

What? Subject Israel and its allies to a pagan king? That's God's idea? Yes, because somehow passing through that chapter in their lives was part of God's plan to save and restore his people. Their timing was not God's timing.

If God is "almighty" it seems to be with a purpose. God's power does not seem to consist in his showy ability to create a four-sided triangle. God's power does not consist in fits of vengeance seeking, like the Incredible Hulk of the universe (you won't like me if I'm angry). God it appears does not routinely suspend the laws of nature even for good people.

God is never more almighty in the Bible than when he frees Israel from their slavery to the Egyptians in the Exodus. God is never more almighty in the Bible than when he raises the good man Jesus from the dead. But that was not until Israel had suffered long at the hand of the Egyptians. It was not until Jesus had been betrayed and suffered a painful and humiliating death on the cross for the sins of the world.

Could it be that God's power is reserved for accomplishing God's goal? And God's goal is to save his people and redeem his world? And could it be that the working of God's Fatherly power looks like a cross as often as it looks like a victory parade? Perhaps God is plenty powerful to accomplish what God has promised his people he will do.

I don't understand why thousands died in an earthquake in what was already one of the most wretched nations on earth. I do believe that God is almighty, and therefore nothing is finally lost. And even this tragedy is not beyond God's redeeming, and will be finally bent to serve God's purposes. And I do believe God grieves for the broken bodies of his children. Therefore I live by hope.

In this world we are taught to love power. Nothing is better than the ability to coerce other people or forces to the doing of your will and thereby guarantee your security. In the creed we are taught about a God who demonstrates the power of love. They are not remotely the same. They do not use the same methods. They do not seek the same goals.

And in the creed we are saying we believe in power of love, far more than the love of power. Do we? In the "Father Almighty" love and power meet, and both are transformed.

## **Conclusion**

Some years ago Christian singer Rich Mullins wrote these words in his song "Creed":

*And I believe that what I believe, is what makes me what I am. I did not make it, no it is making me. It is the very truth of God and not the invention of any man.*

What is making you who you are in this life? To what have you given your heart? That would be your creed.