

**The Apostles' Creed**

***I believe in the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.***

Several years ago, two well-known church leaders penned a telling scenario in an article they wrote for a Christian magazine. Let me share it:

Imagine you went to the doctor and the doctor walked into your room and said, "I've got good news and I've got bad news."

"Okay," you respond. "Let's have the bad news."

"The bad news is that you have an illness that will eventually kill you if left untreated."

"Wow . . ." you respond. "That is bad news. What's the good news?"

"The good news is there's a cure."

"Great! Let's have it."

The doctor shakes her head and clicks her tongue. "No, I'm afraid that if I were simply to give you the cure, I would infringe upon your personhood. You are an individual. You should be able to decide which cures are right for you, which you like, and which you don't. In trying to heal you, I might unintentionally or carelessly impose some treatment upon you that you find offensive. I'm afraid I just can't take that risk."

"Doc!" you shout. "I'm dying!"

"Indeed you are," says the doctor. "But I do have this large stack of medical books that I'll loan you. The cure to your illness is somewhere in these volumes. You are going to have to read carefully, synthesize ideas, and learn information that I could give to you much more quickly, but if you do find the cure before you die, you'll be a better person for it."

Now, we would never accept this kind of answer from a doctor, but too often this is exactly the kind of "medicine" that has been practiced in much of Protestant Christianity in America.<sup>1</sup> The strains of a post-modern siren song have captured the attention of many, including many within our churches. Choosing one's own faith or religion is an appealing option for people and for some in the church it means a reinterpretation of the Christian faith to suit their preferences. Unfortunately, this leaves many American Christians with an anemic faith, unprepared to protect the truth, unprepared to face the vicissitudes of life, their growth in God's grace stunted, rendering them incapable of bringing others to saving faith in Christ. And so, our churches languish.

Yet this need not be the case. **The Christian faith is not something we make up as we go along** nor is it something to be reshaped by each generation's preference or the passing fads of culture. Our Christian faith is a treasure received from the early church, which spent enormous intellectual and moral

energy organizing and articulating the revelation given by God. The Church is a cracked vessel, to be sure, yet it carries the treasure of God's self-revelation and displays it to the world. The teachings of our faith, handed on to us through 2,000 years, gives you and me the means to answer to all who ask, just what it is we believe, and the foundation for living well in all circumstances. Why is this important?

It is because **the Christian faith**, passed on to us by the fathers and mothers of the faith, **is spiritual medicine, meant to cure the "sin-sick soul"** that characterizes the human condition. We have a diagnosis of our illness (sin), a remedy for this illness (the atoning work of Jesus Christ), and a means of application (the power and work of the Holy Spirit). The beliefs that the church has handed on to us ...are effective prescriptions in God's medical kit, just as the Eucharist, baptism, and the Bible are.<sup>2</sup>

A walk on the beach is not the same thing as a map of the ocean; yet the map is essential to get anywhere. The Apostles' Creed, which I've been talking about for the past three Sundays, is our map. I've explained what we mean when we say, *I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth*; then what we are saying when we repeat: *And in Jesus Christ, His only son...* Last week we considered what it means to say, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*.

So, today let's look at the remainder of the Apostles' Creed, coming to perhaps the most important, and yet most controversial message of the Christian community: *I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting*. But before I go there, let's quickly review these other statements:

- ***I believe in the holy catholic***

**Church.** Please notice that "catholic" is always written with a small "c" and "Church" with a capital "C." Now, "catholic," with a small "c," means universal, while "Church" is capitalized to mean the worldwide body of Christians, throughout all time. But many Protestant Christians think "catholic" refers to the Roman Catholic Church. So, **to avoid confusion we simply say "the holy universal Church."**

- ***I believe in the communion of***

**saints.** Early on, believers understood that there was a spiritual union of the members of the Christian Church, both the living and the dead. **In Christ Christians form a single "mystical body" with Christ as the head.** The concept of the communion of saints is linked with Paul's teaching. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it,* I Corinthians 12:13 & 27. (See also Romans 12:4-5).

- ***I believe in the forgiveness of***

**sins.** When Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate (Roman governor), and died on the cross, we believe that He took with Him the consequences that are due us

because of our sins. **He took all our sins upon Himself and broke their power to keep us in bondage and bring us death.**

### **Resurrection Controversy**

Now here's the important and perhaps controversial sentence in the Apostles' Creed: ***I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.*** Recall, that we say of Jesus, ***He was crucified, died, and was buried; On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven...*** That seemed preposterous way back when and to many it sounds preposterous today. Nevertheless, **the first disciples delivered a straight forward message: Jesus of Nazareth lives!** This message of Christianity seemed bizarre, irrational, and mythical then and now. But to skeptics we say, if Jesus' resurrection is a myth, surely those first disciples could have done a better job of establishing proofs and airtight alibis for His story. And surely the authorities would have produced His dead body. But the first Christians were not interested in establishing proofs or explanations for His resurrection, for they were too excited about the reality of it!

Only one person in history has succeeded in defeating death with living witnesses of the fact. That is Jesus Christ. **Without the Resurrection, there would be no gospel, no church, and no hope.** Without the Resurrection, all that Christians could claim is a great teacher, dynamic prophet, maybe a new set of teachings. Yeah, His resurrection is still controversial ... and still life changing!

There are five different resurrection accounts in the Bible (Matt. 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-51; John 20:1-20; and 1 Cor. 15:3-8). There are also references to the Resurrection in public speeches by Peter (Acts 2:29-36; 3:12-26), Stephen (Acts 7:1-56), Phillip (Acts 8:26-40) and Paul (Antioch-Acts 13:13-43, Athens-Acts 17:16-34, and Jerusalem-Acts 21:27-22:11). The Gospel accounts differ in detail, and the risen Lord's appearances differ, but all accounts agree that something stupendous happened. No one really saw it coming, but wow, what an event! The power of this event to change lives explains why early believers went willingly to their deaths rather than deny what they knew. Taken together with the revelation of God's word, the Resurrection explains God's purpose in history and for humanity.

### **What Does Resurrection Have To Do With You and Me?**

On Easter Sunday we sing this Charles Wesley hymn: ***Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!*** But wait! Do you remember stanza 4? It gets to the heart of the matter; it gets to what His resurrection has to do with us. ***Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia! Following our exalted Head, Alleluia! Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!*** ... seriously now? We soar with Him; follow Him?

The daily news abounds with stories of killings, war, death from disease and starvation. Our loved ones still die. As George Bernard Shaw remarked, "The statistics on death have not changed. One out of one person dies." Worldwide, there are approximately 56,600,000 deaths each year. That works out to 107 per minute, 1.8 per second. The Greek playwright Sophocles said: "Of all the great wonders, none is greater than man. Only for death can he find no cure."

So, does Christ's Resurrection really mean anything for you and me? If Jesus' resurrection was not real, if He did not rise from death bodily, audibly, and completely; if resurrection is merely a metaphor for His goodness that lives on in spite of death, then resurrection has no relevance for us. ***For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have died in Christ have perished. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost, 1 Cor. 15:13-18. If He wasn't raised from death then neither can we be.*** And if there is no life everlasting, then why not just "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die?" If there is no life to come, then it's grab for all the gusto you can in this life, and if that means cutting moral corners, so what?

But if Jesus was raised from the dead, then there is hope for us, and friends, that is the promise to us. ***But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through one man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man, 1 Cor. 15:20-21.*** Christians make this bold claim: a whole new era has begun in human history. The Bible tells us what lies beyond death for those who know Jesus. ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die, John 11:25-26.*** Bad things don't go away, but they don't have power over us. That's because our hope is in God's actions – primarily raising Jesus from death.

### **Made for More**

Sometimes we look at the world around us and wonder, "Is that all there is?" And God's answer is "No!" ***We are now enveloped in an eternal love that will not let us go. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, Romans 8:38-39.*** God has guaranteed our future resurrection. The last resurrection took place 2000 years ago. Yet it was the real deal and the "first fruits" of what is to come for you and me. God did not leave His Son in the grave, and He will not abandon those who trust in His Son. ***Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come, 2 Cor. 5:5.*** Some translations say the Spirit is given as a "down payment." When you buy a house, you put down a

**sum of money. It's a small amount that legally binds you to pay the full amount later. That's what God has done by giving us His Holy Spirit.**

### **The Last Word**

**What is required for your resurrection? You've got to die first! And unless the Lord comes very soon that will be the way most of us will end our earthly journey. I say that not to alarm anyone but to state the simple fact. Every Christian who has ever lived has died eventually. So far that's the report from the cemetery. But, **thank God, death is not the last word.** We think we're going from the land of the living to the land of the dying. But that is not true. **We're going from the land of the dying to the land of the living,** because God is not finished with you or me yet, and His love will never let us go.**

**Knowing all this we can say this phrase from the Apostles Creed out loud and with conviction, just to remind us of what Christians have always believed:**  
***I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.***

---

<sup>1</sup> William Abraham & David F. Watson, *Creedal Faith*, Ministry Matters, Nov. 30, 2014.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5592/creedal-faith>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.