

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Apostles' Creed: Father Almighty”

Rev. Mark Lampley

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Even though this Sunday is liturgically called Pentecost, when the church normally celebrates the Holy Spirit, we pastors are using this opportunity to go broader. Today and throughout our summer sermon series, we'll be addressing the mystery of one God in three persons. The means by which we do so will be through the Apostle's Creed. As we systematically walk through it, we'll hope to clarify some of the more challenging clauses. The foundational theological terms: conception by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, heaven, descending into hell- (some congregations don't even recite), ascension, that curious “holy catholic Church” part, and resurrection of the body.

In our congregational survey y'all told us you wanted to learn about this from the pulpit, so put your seatbelts on!

Pastor Ben, Janna and I structurally designed it so we'll preach: two sermons on the 1st person of the Trinity, God the Father; five sermons on the 2nd person of the Trinity, Jesus; and two on the 3rd person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

The series is unified, yet each sermon is a very independent sermon so even if you're gone for a few weeks, you'll be fine. To help you navigate where we are during any given sermon of the series, note in our bulletin the underlined phrase. As you can see, today's focus is on the “Father Almighty” of the 1st paragraph. The combined three paragraphs chronologically make up the 2nd of 12 creeds, confessions or catechisms from Part 1 of our *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, *the Book of Confessions*. Incidentally, Part 2 is the Book of Order.

To go deeper with the “Father Almighty,” let's turn to today's gospel reading. Hear now Jesus' teaching as a part of his longest sermon, we often call the Sermon on the Mount. Listen especially for God's character in Mt. 6:25-34:

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is

the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

PRAYER: "Teach the precious truths which you impart, O God, and wing my words that they may reach the hidden depths of many-a heart" (PH #722) Amen.

Jesus points to birds and flowers to reveal the heavenly Father's sovereign and compassionate care. When we feel forgotten, Jesus reminds us that God knows our needs. Food, drink, and clothing are no real hurdle to the Creator of all things. If God clothes the fields with beauty, surely God will care for us and sustain God's kingdom.

When we come to this text, we may wonder about what we *think* are inefficiencies. Sadly, we know not everyone has enough. Our world is marked by inequality and scarcity. Yet even in suffering, Scripture points us toward God's sufficiency and also calls us to become vessels of mercy and justice for others.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 is not merely "don't worry." It is fundamentally a proclamation about God's character—faithful, compassionate, powerful, and near to us.

Paul echoes these same assertions in Philippians 4: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Here, again, this is about our Provider, our Savior, our Lord who brings peace through the Cross. Christian peace rests not merely in advice, but in the presence of the indwelling Spirit who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

The Apostles' Creed, which can be a vehicle of peaceful reassurance, is a gift to us. Stating it regularly together unifies us with common beliefs across the denominations.

"When did the A.C. originate?" you ask. How was it used by the early Church? To help answer these questions, I pass along some of what I've learned from two inspiring Presbyterian pastors in our Presbytery. One is Rev. Dr. Donald McKim, a former seminary professor who taught a course here earlier this year. In his book [The Apostles' Creed](#), he shares wonderful insights. The other is Rev. Lina Hart, Parish Associate at 2nd Presbyterian Chattanooga, who has been a church educator friend for over 20 years. I'm edified by his books and her sermon so I'm sharing some of their rich insights throughout today's sermon.

Don explains some historical points and usages. The Apostles Creed is the best known and most widely used creed in Western churches. It began as a basic creed for those who were to be baptized.

From the second through ninth centuries, the Apostles' Creed developed as a baptismal confession of faith, often culminating training by Easter.

Early baptismal candidates were asked:

"Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?" I believe.

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" I believe.

"Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" I believe.

After each confession came immersion into the waters of baptism. These personal affirmations help explain why the Apostles' Creed uses "I believe" language, unlike the Nicene Creed, which uses "We" language.

The baptism administered was for the forgiveness of sins and entrance into the church, the body of Jesus Christ. When baptism candidates confessed both sins and beliefs, they were doing something we do to this day, participating in "*faith seeking understanding*." We put into words what God has done and our response to God's grace.

Faith still seeks understanding today. In Sequoyah church, we have been asking how we can help believers grow deeper in faith, trust, and spiritual maturity. We're all prone to have a *small* image of God, so we need to enlarge it, along with all our beliefs and understandings. When Jesus said, "you of little faith," he's warning us, so we don't give in so quickly to anxiety. A puny faith has many consequences; one is that it leads people to trust in uncertain and fleeting riches.

Recently, while hiking with a new group, someone told me, "I'm not sure about God. I just want to be kind and enjoy nature." Her comment reminded me how many people long for goodness and beauty yet have never encountered the fullness of life found in a relationship with Jesus.

One of the gifts the Church has given the world is the witness across the centuries: God is personal. We remember this message through professing the Apostles' Creed with its Biblical basis.

The Bible teaches that God is personal. God relates to humans as a parent relates to a child. From the Torah, we learn the nation of Israel believed God dealt with them in highly personal ways. The Psalmist proclaimed, "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord as compassion for those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13).

"Father" or "Abba" is the name Jesus used to describe the God he proclaimed. Jesus instructed his disciples in what we call the Lord's Prayer, pray then in this way, "Our Father in heaven." The term "Father" does not mean God is male; it is an expression of the personal parental relationship Jesus proclaims it is possible to have with God. Our relationship with the God of the Hebrew scriptures and the God of Jesus Christ is with a personal, loving "parent" who created us, sustains us, and who loves and forgives us. We are united to God through faith in Christ who was so personal that even unchurched people can tell you about his family- his mom, dad, cousin John the Baptist.

When Jesus speaks of the parable of the Prodigal Son, he speaks of the father's relationship to his sons as caring and loving as well as forgiving. Plus, the father is radically enthusiastic and generous with his reception of his wayward child. Our heavenly Father wants to welcome us back, if we've walked away.

Whenever when we recite the Apostles' Creed, we interpret its very first words as an affirmation of God's loving closeness to us.

The Apostles' Creed's reference for God as our Father, obviously implies we are God's beloved children. We would be wise to revel in that comfort that we belong in a covenantal relationship, even without doing anything. We'd be crazy to ignore the valuable parent-child intertwined relationship, like that of God the Father and God the Son. John's gospel goes into much more depth if you're interested.

The creed confesses God as personal as one's own Dad, yet this loving Father is also the almighty Creator of all things, seen and unseen. God is all powerful yet without any kind of Pharaoh-like role. "Almighty" doesn't mean God has a "bigger hammer" than anyone else. It was originally meant to convey God's nature of "all-ruling," "all-sovereign," *El Shaddai*. This is also the God who constantly blesses. Job 33:4 says, "The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

In seminary, they ask, "According to Scripture, what gender language do we use to refer to God?" Using a wide breadth of terms and titles for God can be a struggle, but we need to err on the side of understanding God beyond our limiting terminology. God is like a Father, and God is like a Mother. And, God is much more than those terms. In fact, the Bible has over 80 different names and terms for God. Fran Dotterweich's recorded Sunday School lessons explore many of those if you're interested.

The Apostles' Creed is more than words we remember and recite. They are words we act on. It is the Church's witness across centuries to a hurting world that we belong to a: personal, providing, sovereign God. The same Father Almighty and flaming Spirit who guided believers in the earliest days of the Church still uses us today—with mercy, peace, hope, and everlasting love.

What does this mean for YOU to profess belief in God the "Father Almighty"?ⁱ To God be the glory. Amen.
