Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth

Text: Revelation 4:9-11 -- And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Introduction: This is the third message in our series, "**Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed**." Two weeks ago, we considered the purpose of creeds and why it's worth our time to study this one in particular, not written by the Apostles but named for them because it's based on their teaching. **We said that a creed is a confession of faith. The Apostles' Creed helps us communicate with others, inside and outside the church, what we believe concerning God the Father, Son, and Spirit, the hope of salvation, the church, and future things**. Then last week we talked about the first statement in the creed, "**I believe in God**." Together we looked at the priority of believing in God (*without **faith** it's impossible to please God*), the person who believes in God (*for **whoever** would **draw near** to God*) and the particulars of believing in God (*must believe **He exists** and that **rewards** those who diligently seek Him*).

Now here's one more reminder before we launch into the next part of the creed. Lest there be any confusion, we are using the word "**believe**" here in the way it's used the vast majority of times in the Bible where it means to "**rely on**," "**put confidence in**" and "**to trust**." In its verb form, the word is used **ninety-nine times** in the Gospel of John with the purpose that people might "**believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing … have life in His name (John 20:31**)." **The idea is that what we believe transforms who we are (*children of wrath become children of God*) and how we behave. Unfortunately, too many people today speak the word "believe" as if it is merely an intellectual decree that has no bearing on their lives**. Award-winning investigative journalist **Petra Reski** is one of the world's leading experts on the **Italian mafia**. Her book, ***The Honored Society: A Portrait of Italy's Most Powerful Mafia***, delves into the personal lives and the faith of its members and supporters. "**Faith**' in God and living like a Mafioso are fairly common in the strange world of Italian mobsters. For example, **Sicilian Mafia member Marcello Fava**, who later left his mafia clan, told an Italian journalist: "***Before I had to kill someone, I would cross myself. I would say: 'Dear God, stand by me! Make sure nothing happens***!' ***But I wasn't the only one who crossed himself beforehand and prayed to God. We all did***." When mafia boss **Bernardo Provenzano** was arrested, the police found him with five Bibles, with hundreds of his own margin comments and passages underlined. In his home were 91 sacred statues, 73 of them Christ figures. Each one of them bore the inscription: ***Jesus, I put my trust in you.*** Mafia boss **Michele Greco** has four books in his prison cell: two liturgical books, the gospels, and a book entitled *Pray, Pray*. During his trial, when asked for an explanation to his many murders, he merely replied: "***I have an invaluable gift—inner peace***." Let me be clear. That's not the kind of "believing" we're talking about. Faith for us is LIFE-TRANSFORMING. **True Christians not only begin to see the world as God SEES it, but we desire to approach the world as God APPROACHES it. We love those in the world but**

continually work to remain unstained by it (**James 1:27 – This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world**). Now that we've drawn this distinction, let's spend the remaining part of our time and consider the next part of the Apostles' Creed … ***I believe in God the Father Almighty, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH***.

God the Father. The Bible teaches that God is a father in at least three ways.

- **He's the father of mankind**. In **Acts 17:28** Paul is preaching to the men of Athens when he quotes an ancient poet, "… **for we are indeed His offspring**." He's saying that in one sense, anyone can claim God as his Father because we all come from God. Paul says the same thing in **Ephesians 4:6**, "(There is) **one God and Father of all, who is over all (above everyone) and through all and in all (superior to everyone)"**.
- **He's the father of Jesus Christ**. At least forty times in the Gospels Jesus refers to God as His father. ***Here's what the Bible says about their relationship***: **The son loves the father** (**John 14:31**) **and does everything to please Him** (**John 8:29**). **It also says that the father loves the son** (**John 3:35; 5:20**) and **brings Him honor and glory** (**John 17:1**).
- **He's the father of all believers**. As the Creator, God is the father of all mankind but the Bible teaches that only some have been adopted into His family (**Ephesians 1:5 – In love, He predestined us (Christians) to be adopted as His Sons through Jesus Christ**). We alone share the status of being called children of God and not because of anything we've done, but because God willed it to be so (**John 1:12-13 – To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name He gave the right to become children of God – children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God**). Now let me ask, "***How does it affect you to know that God is your Heavenly Father***?" "***Do you find comfort in knowing that no one can snatch you out of His hand*** (**John 10:29**)?" We'll talk more about this in a few minutes, so let's move on for now.

God the Almighty. One of the names of God comes from **Genesis 17:1**. It is **El Shaddai** and is translated "**God Almighty**." God claimed this name for himself as He spoke to Abraham and informed him that the promise He made many years before was about to come to pass ... ***that Abraham would become the father of many nations*** (**See Genesis 15**). We know that God does everything with a purpose, and so clearly, He was very intentional about sharing His name. It was necessary because Abraham had doubted the promise of God and took matters into his own hand resulting in a child by another woman (Hagar gave birth to Ishmael) instead of his wife. **Now at the ripe old age of ninety-nine his body would not even allow him to father a child with Sarah, not to mention that fact that she was an old woman**. On what basis did He make this promise? ***He is El Shaddai – God Almighty and nothing is impossible with Him***! If you've read the story, you know that Abraham did father a child nine months later who would become the heir of the promise (Isaac). **Now the New Testament** also recognizes that God is almighty, or we might say "**omnipotent**." Nine times in the book of Revelation He is referred to as **God Almighty**. The word means "***to have all strength***." The Bible does acknowledge that there are some things God cannot do because if He did He would not be God (***die*** – **Jeremiah 10:10 – He is the Living God**; ***be imperfect*** – **Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect**; ***go back on His word or change His plans*** – **James 1:17**; and ***lie*** – **Titus 1:2 – God … does not lie**). **When we say He is omnipotent, we're claiming that God is in complete control of His creation and exercises absolute rule over it**. The Apostles' Creed mentions this

characteristic of God because there are many times in life when we might wonder if in fact it's true. When we get some unwelcome news, when there isn't enough money to buy groceries, when a family is breaking up, we're prone to question if He is in fact God Almighty – El Shaddai. **In these moments, know that God can't stop being God!! He will always be the One who has ultimate control over all of His creation, including you and everyone who impacts your life**. (Review: God the Father, God the Almighty.)

God the Creator. ***Some people believe the world evolved as the result of a cosmic explosion*** (the Big Bang Theory) ***that allowed a small, but incredibly dense piece of eternal matter to expand very rapidly and form everything that now exists***. That's one possible explanation for creation, but as you know it raises some questions: (**1**) **How did life come about from inanimate matter**? (**2**) **Where did the human soul come from**? (**3**) **If nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, how could we have such rapid expansion of the universe in such a short time**? **Look … there are many holes in this explanation of the origin of everything. That's why it is called a theory**. Believers have a different answer to the question of the origin of the universe. ***We believe God created it***. **While evolution as a worldview leaves God out of the picture completely, we acknowledge that He spoke everything into being**. This is what the Bible says in many places including **Revelation 4:11.** Here is where the Apostle John is given a vision of heaven and four living creatures and twenty-four elders that surround the throne of God and declare, "**Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory, and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and are created**." Obviously, I'm not going to share anything today that will resolve the great debate over how the universe came into being. Just note that evolutionists and Christians see it differently.

Why is the doctrine of creation by God so important to us? **It is because if you deny that God created everything, you will eventually lose the doctrine of redemption**. In **Revelation 5:9** we see that the same elders who worshipped God as Creator worship the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us with His own blood. "**Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation**." Read the **first part of Genesis** and you see that the story of creation leads to the reality of the fall. Take away the creation account and it is not necessary for Christ to come and pay for our sins in our place. We are not lost and bound for Hell. In fact, human beings have no future after life on this planet. That's why we must agree that God is our creator. If He is not, then redemption is a moot point.

Here are a few concluding thoughts about God the Father, God the Almighty, God the Creator.

- **As our Father, God WILL act for our good**. Listen to these verses from **Matthew 7:9-11 – Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your *Father* who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him**? Again from the words of James, the half brother of Jesus **(James 1:17) -- Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the *Father* of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change**. If you're a father, or aspire to be one, just think for a moment about how much you desire to bless your children with what is inherently good in its character. Now as a child of God, you can rest assured that He wants

the same thing for you only more so because His desires are absolutely pure and holy. No matter what is going on in your life today know with certainty that God will always act for your good.

- **As the Almighty, God CAN act for our good**. It is one thing to earnestly desire good for someone and it's another to actually be able to make it happen. How many times have you said to yourself, "***If I had the means I'd take care of that person's medical bills or help that child get to summer camp***"? As God omnipotent, our Heavenly Father not only wants what is best for His children, but is able to bring it about. **Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that God is … able to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work with in us**. Let me put it this way: **if God's power were limited than His ability to act for your good would be as well, but it is not**!

  Remember back to **Numbers chapter eleven**. Moses complained to God that the people were hungry as he led them from Egypt to the Promised Land. In response, the Lord promised so much food that it would be coming out of their nostrils. Moses simply couldn't imagine how it would happen. "**Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them**?" I love the Lord's response, "**Is the Lord's arm too short**?" In the Old Testament, the arm/hand of the Lord is a symbol of His strength. ***His point to Moses is that He can always do what He purposes to do***. Let's not forget that! The Almighty God has what it takes to act for your good. (**God WILL act for our good, CAN act for our good**)

- **As the Creator, God HAS acted for your good**. The Genesis account of creation tells us that God made everything and that everything He made was good. This includes men. **In fact, when God fashioned man, He made us in His image … which at minimum means to reflect His glory and holiness**. Of nothing else in all of the universe does it say that! Sure, creation reveals some of His divine attributes (**Romans 1**), but only man is made in His image. Now listen … **the more His likeness is seen in us, the more joy and dignity we have. The less His likeness is seen in us, the less joy and dignity we have**. Jesus fulfilled the image of God perfectly. As a human being, He only sought to do His Father's will and to bring Him glory. "**The One who sent me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases Him (John 8:29)**." He so completely portrayed the image of His Father that Jesus could say to Philip, "**He who has seen me has seen the Father** (**John 14:9**)." **Now,** Jesus wants His joy to be in us. This occurs when we more fully bear the image of God to our world as He did. "**If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete** (**John 15:10-11**)." If you find yourself lacking joy today, perhaps the problem is that ***you are not bearing God's image the way He created you to***.

Conclusion: Well, there you have it … the next line of the Apostles' Creed … ***God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth***. **Does this line of the creed describe someone you would like to know personally … someone who will act for your good, can act for your good and already has acted for your good**? Some people refer to the experience of putting one's faith in Christ as Savior and Lord as a kind of ***personal awakening***. This is how **Bible scholar N.T. Wright** in his book ***Simply Christian*** refers to it. He uses the analogy of ***waking up in the***

morning for how some people come to Christ through a dramatic, instant conversion and others come to Christ through a gradual conversion. ***He writes***: Waking up offers one of the most basic pictures of what can happen when God takes a hand in someone's life. There are classic alarm-clock stories, Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, blinded by a sudden light, stunned and speechless, discovered that the God he had worshipped had revealed himself in the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. **John Wesley** found his heart becoming strangely warm and he never looked back. They and a few others are the famous ones, but there are millions more. And there are many stories, though they don't hit the headlines in the same way, of the half-awake and half-asleep variety. Some people take months, years, maybe even decades, during which they aren't sure whether they're on the outside of Christian faith looking in, or on the inside looking around to see if it's real. As with ordinary waking up, there are many people who are somewhere in between. But the point is that there's such a thing as being asleep, and there's such a thing as being awake. **And it's important to tell the difference, and to be sure you're awake by the time you have to be up and ready for action, whatever that action may be**. Is it time for you to wake up to God as Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth? If you're one of those who has been lulled to spiritual sleep … listen … your alarm clock is going off! It's time to wake up to new life in Christ.

NOW JOIN ME AND LET'S DECLARE TOGETHER THAT WE ARE FULLY AWAKE TO GOD BY RECITING THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.