**Preaching Series: Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed**
**Sermon Title: The Importance of the Apostles' Creed**

**Text: 2 Timothy 1:8-12 -- Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.**

**Introduction: *You are what you believe*!** Do you agree with that statement? I know many of us would. **We understand that our lives are the product of our deep, heartfelt convictions about what we believe is true**. These convictions shape our choices and ultimately our purpose and because of that, they matter very much. This morning I want to begin a new preaching series intended to help us to review some of our beliefs called, "***Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed***." **By a show of hands, let me ask how many of you grew up in a church that recited the Apostles' Creed on Sunday mornings**. I did and I know that many churches continue to do so today, though it seems that in evangelical congregations, we have gotten away from it. In its earliest form (***around 125 AD***) it was likely a series of statements that were confessed at a believer's baptism on Easter Eve after three years of doctrinal instruction. The next day, on Easter, they would celebrate their first communion.

W**hat's so special about the Apostles' Creed today**? Why should we take several Sundays to understand and even commit it to memory? **Pastor Ray Pritchard** suggests three reasons why it's important: **(1) it is the oldest and most widely accepted creed, recognized by Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians**. There are many statements we might not agree on, but this isn't one of them. **(2) It offers a broad survey of the most essential truths in the Scriptures**. The creed begins where Genesis does, with God and creation, and ends with eternal life. And though it does not include everything we believe, what it states is in complete agreement with the Bible. **(3) It offers a radical challenge to the denial of absolute truth that is so prevalent in a culture today.** In our postmodern world, many people believe that the pursuit of absolute truth is FUTILE. We can never know it. ***These same people would argue that Christianity's claims of ultimate truth have only served to hurt society by repressing people and preventing them from experiencing true freedom and fulfillment***. That's why we Christians are often regarded as the enemy today. We say that certain behaviors are right and wrong because the Bible says they are! The Apostles' Creed ***is a statement of what we believe to be true ABSOLUTELY***. Anyone who submits to its teaching will experience life, eternal and full. Those who disobey will face the consequence of their moral rebellion … death and destruction. It has real value.

Over the next several weeks we'll be looking at each of the statements contained in the creed, the biblical basis for them, and the implications for us as Christ-followers. But this morning I thought it would be important to consider ***four reasons*** why the Apostles' Creed is worthy of

our attention (*from the Apostles' Creed – All You Need to Believe by C. Donald Cole, p. 10*). **Let's begin**.

**The Apostles' Creed presents the Gospel concisely.** About twenty years ago I had a pastor tell me that he would never recite this creed or ask his congregation to do so because ***"there is nothing in it that the devil himself couldn't agree with, and THAT didn't make him a believer."*** I could not disagree more! **Just starting with the phrase "I believe" proves my point**. According to **Vine's New Testament Dictionary** **to believe is to put one's trust in something**. On rare occasions, it is used in the Bible to refer to a mere agreement with a stated set of facts. For example, when it's speaking of demons it says this in **James 2:19 – You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder**. Obviously, demons have not placed their faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord! **Almost everywhere else, however, it means to rely upon Jesus; to place one's confidence in Him**. Take what the Apostle Paul says in **2 Timothy 1:12** as an example: "**But I'm not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me**." The context of this verse is Paul imprisoned in Rome and asking Timothy to come and see him, ***even if it means bearing evil treatment as a result***. Their hope was, after all, in God who saved them through Christ, having conquered death and brought life to them as they ***believed*** in the Gospel message. **Believing for Paul wasn't some sort of fact-check thing like we see in the papers today when a politician makes a statement and someone tries to verify if it's true or not**. It was nothing less than a complete commitment of his mind, emotions, and will to trust in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. ***He believed in Jesus***.

Whenever believers recite the Apostles' Creed, we proclaim that same Gospel message that saints like Paul have confessed for the last twenty-one centuries. We affirm God as Father and Creator of everything including us and Christ as His only Son and our Lord who is God incarnate and was born of a virgin, suffered and died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day having conquered sin and death. We share our belief that He has been exalted and glorified (*He now sits at the right hand of the Father*) and will someday come again to this world not as a suffering servant, but as a triumphant King to judge the living and dead. We affirm our belief in the Holy Spirit who brings us into the church and sanctifies us. We believe that we have been forgiven of our sins and now possess life everlasting. There's more, of course, but that's a pretty good presentation of the Gospel. ***I'm confident that someone could read this creed and know enough to become a Christian***. In a past ***Rolling Stone*** interview, the richest man in the world at the time, **Bill Gates,** was asked "***Do you believe in God***?" Gates said that he believes science has now filled in some explanations for disease and the weather. **But after admitting that science can't explain everything, Gates shared an intriguing comment about his openness to God**: The mystery and the beauty of the world is overwhelmingly amazing, and there's no scientific explanation of how it came about. To say that it was generated by random numbers, that does seem, you know, sort of an uncharitable view [laughs]. ***I think it makes sense to believe in God, but exactly what decision in your life you make differently because of it, I don't know***. **I get what he's saying. Until we know what we believe, we will not know how to act**. The Apostles' Creed can bring some clarity to a man like Bill Gates. It explains the "how" of salvation so that anyone can experience the life-transforming power of God. And it all begins with believing the good news! (**Review: The Apostle's Creed presents the gospel concisely.**)

**The Apostles' Creed protects the church from heresy (false teaching from within).** The word CREED refers to ***a belief system***. The earliest one found in the Bible was Peter's great confession, "***Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*** (**Matthew 16:16**)." It was sufficient at the moment to summarize the disciples' beliefs about Jesus. Later, when doctrinal error began to creep into the body of Christ, the early church fathers felt the need to provide lengthier creeds that covered more of their beliefs. **Eventually several became prominent, each one written to deal with some kind of false teaching**. **The Nicene Creed** (*AD 325*) defended THE DEITY OF CHRIST (*that He is God the Son*) against the teaching of a man named **Arius** who did not believe in the Trinity … ***that one God exists eternally in three persons***. Instead, **he taught that the Father, Son, and Spirit were three materially separate beings**. Arius believed that God the Father created the Son at a certain point in time. In answer to that teaching, the creed specifically states that Jesus was "***begotten, not made***." Another called **the Chalcedony Creed** (*AD 451*) was written to affirm that Christ was both FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN, a doctrine so important to the Christian faith that without it salvation becomes impossible! ***So what was the purpose of the Apostles' Creed***? It was put forth TO REFUTE THE TEACHING OF A GROUP OF MYSTICE TEACHERS CALLED GNOSTICS. **They claimed for themselves a secret knowledge of God**. They believed the created world was evil and only the spirit world was good. Jesus could not have become a man because that would make him evil. Instead, it was only the spirit of God that came upon the man Jesus at His baptism and then left Him at the cross. **Salvation then depended on being awakened by their special knowledge to be reunited with God**. That's why John the Apostle begins his first letter arguing they were not following a spirit, but a real person: **That which was from the beginning (before the beginning), which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life**. He understood that salvation comes to believers through the INCARNATE CHRIST. The Apostle's Creed makes it very clear when it says, "**Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary"**. (**Review: The Apostle's Creed presents the gospel concisely; it protects the church from heresy.**)

**The Apostles' Creed preserves the Apostle's teaching.** So far we've said that it **presents the Gospel message concisely** and **protects the church from heresy,** but this statement of faith also was a way to **keep the doctrines of the church from changing as Christianity spread throughout the world and to each new generation of believers. By the way, it is called the Apostles' Creed not because they wrote it, but because it is a summary of their teaching**. And who better to follow than those who had first-hand experience with Christ (**2 Peter 1:16 – For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty**)? As the apostles died off, people often had access to only portions of the Gospels and the other New Testament letters. ***It was vital then that steps were taken to preserve the integrity of the faith*** … thus we have the creed. **It was a way of affirming the movement's essential teachings without which a person simply could not be a Christian**. It's what we're trying to do in our church through our Connection Groups. These groups share four elements … ***a close-knit community***, ***biblical content***, ***prayer for one another and outreach to the community***. So we do our best to make sure that ***every*** group understands the importance of all four elements and is committed to each one. It's our way of protecting the purity of purpose for each group. That's the idea behind the creed. **It identifies those who confess it with the *historical Christian faith* as it was handed**

**down from the Apostles**. It prevents believers from getting off track doctrinally. That's why I would say that In my opinion, If you don't agree with any one of these statements, it may well be that you are not a Christian. Let me put it another way: ***Which one would you want to deny yet still call yourself a Christ-follower***? (**Review: The Apostle's Creed presents the gospel concisely; it protects the church from heresy; it preserves the apostle's teaching.)**

**The Apostles' Creed provides boundaries for Christian fellowship (false teaching from without).** When I was at Trinity a group of **Seventh Day Adventists** came to the school and met with professors in the hope of securing their endorsement to be received into the fellowship of mainstream Christianity. They then engaged in an extensive discussion of their teachings, some of which were not of such a nature that they would not prevent other believers from fellowshipping with them. Take **soul sleep** for example. Adventists teach that when a believer dies, his soul enters a time of restful sleep until the resurrection. While we would disagree on this issue (**Philippians 1:23 – Paul said to depart (this world) and be with Christ is very much better**), it certainly isn't a matter that puts them in conflict with the Gospel. If you read their website you will see some of their belief statements … **we believe that God loves, creates, redeems, inhabits, transforms and triumphs** … and be inclined to agree with many of them. However, that would be very dangerous. ***You see they teach some things that are contrary to our understanding and belief about salvation***. **Seventh Day Adventists believe that observing the Sabbath (on Saturdays) and Jewish dietary laws is a requirement for church membership, and may be for salvation as well**. ***They also believe in something called "investigative judgment***." It teaches that right now in ***the Holy of Holies in the Heavenly Sanctuary*** **Christ is conducting an investigation into the lives of all who have ever professed belief in Him**. He is judging all their works, by the standard of God's Law. **All those whose lives fail to measure up to the standard of the Law are rejected and condemned as not having true faith**. Those whose lives meet that standard and thus manifest the perfect character and righteousness of Christ are recognized as having true faith, and so their sins are "**blotted out**." What's my point? ***Well, as far as it pertains to salvation,***, their teaching on the Sabbath is contrary to our Christian beliefs (**Galatians 2:16 – a man is not justified by works of the law**). And when it comes to investigative judgment ***it is clearly contrary to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone*** (**Galatians 2:8-9 – For by grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast**). Now I didn't share this just to pick on Seventh Day Adventists but to make the point that **there are boundaries for Christian fellowship and they are determined not by how we feel about someone else, but by the agreement of our essential beliefs**. The Apostles' Creed can be a very effective tool in helping us establish these kinds of boundaries. (**Review: The Apostle's Creed presents the gospel concisely; it protects the church from heresy; it preserves the apostle's teaching; it provides boundaries for Christian fellowship.)**

**Let's wrap this up by asking the question, "**What am I asking you to do with the Apostles' Creed?" During this sermon series, I would like you to do three things:

- **Believe It. If you haven't yet come to the place of believing the Gospel message … that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness; that God provided the means for this to happen through the sacrifice of His sinless Son on the cross; that His resurrection demonstrates Jesus conquered sin and death and has the power to give life to others; and through**

**personal faith in Him you can be a part of the community of faith and have life everlasting … then please make that choice today to believe the Good News.**

- **Memorize It. If the Bible is *a detailed map* that tells us exactly how to get where God wants us to be, the Apostles' Creed is more like *a map at 60,000 feet* that gives us the big picture of what Christians believe. It's good to memorize it because you might not always have your Bible around when you need it. But if you, like the early Christians, will take the time to commit this creed to memory, you will always be able to recall the essential truths of your faith.**
- **Share It. Our first point was that it presents the Gospel concisely (clearly and succinctly). If you want someone else to understand what you believe as a Christian, this is one very good way to do it. Just share it.**

**Conclusion: Here's a quote from a 20-something backpacker in Boston who responded to an interviewer about what he believed. "*I don't know what I believe in. And if I believe – I believe there's some High Power, I think. But I don't know. Like right now I'm at a point where I don't know what to believe, but I'm open to everything. So I like to believe in everything because I don't know what it is to truly believe in*." I appreciate the man's honesty, but if he speaks for the majority of young people in our country, then we had better get back to the business of giving them something substantial to believe in … and the Apostles' Creed is a great place to start.**

**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.**