

***Sermon Series: “I Believe in...”    Sermon Title: “God”***  
***Psalm 8; Job 38-39; Luke 11:1-13; Romans 1:18-23***  
***Salem United Methodist Church; July 28, 2019***  
***Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling***

The Apostles’ Creed was not written by the original apostles, but evolved as a statement of belief from the mid-second century to its final form in the 400s. The bishops of the church felt that a statement was needed to codify what Christians believe to dispel beliefs that were deemed as heresy. One of these heresies was created by a bishop named Marcion who formulated a belief that the God of the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament) was not the same God of Jesus or the God of the New Testament. Marcion saw the Old Testament God as evil and vindictive whereas the Father of Jesus is good and loving. He also didn’t believe that Jesus was born of Mary but appeared in a spirit form as a man. Marcion also believed that because God was loving and forgiving there would be no judgement. Some Christians today still subscribe to some of Marcion’s beliefs. The Apostles’ Creed was written by the early church to summarize the belief in the One God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the next six weeks we will be exploring each of the beliefs stated in the Apostles’ Creed. Today we are looking at our belief in God. How would you describe God?

Credo is the Latin word for “I believe...” I remember a song, “I Believe.” Frankie Lane made these words of hope popular in the 1950s during the Korean war. “I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows. I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows. I believe for everyone that goes astray someone will come to show the way. I believe. I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard. I believe that someone in the great somewhere hears every word. Every time I hear a newborn baby cry or touch a leaf or see the sky, then I know why I believe.” This song is a type of credo. When we say we believe, we say that we have hope, such as, “I believe the Nats will go to the World Series this year.” We also use the words, “I believe...” when we speak about a particular product, such as, “I believe Coca-cola tastes better than Pepsi.” We also use the words, “I believe,” for some deeper beliefs. We may hold strong beliefs about global warming, the role of government, gay rights, gun control, immigration, the death penalty, abortion, and other issues. Our beliefs are often shaped by our families and peers. Sometimes we believe the way our parents believed or we choose to believe the opposite from them. Our beliefs are also shaped from personal experiences both the painful ones and the loving, beautiful ones. Our deeper beliefs shape who we are and how we live. They motivate us into the act of serving in some ways, even to the point of sacrificing our time, energy, and financial resources. Our beliefs can motivate us to do either good or harm. What we believe affects what it means for us to be human. Our values, morality, goals, ambitions, hopes, dreams, and how we view others are all shaped by what we believe.

So to claim the first part of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth,” how does this belief shape us and how we live? Does this belief statement have an effect on our choices such as: who we choose as a life partner, what careers we choose, how we parent, how we spend our money, what we do with our time in retirement, and how we face adversity?

Before we strive to answer these questions, let’s look at the parts of this belief statement. I believe in God. Most of us know someone who claims to not believe in God. For these people, belief in God is ridiculous, anti-intellectual, and even dangerous. I can understand their arguments. Christians can seem anti-intellectual when we are more concerned about eternal salvation, then caring for all God’s creation: the environment and all humans. Both caring in the here and now is as important as receiving eternal life. As United Methodists, we believe that God gave us a brain to think and the ability to challenge thoughts. We use our intellect to study both scriptures and the sciences to seek truth. I can also understand the argument that belief in God can be dangerous when people of faith claim that one group of people is superior over another and then they seek ways to harm the other group. Another argument against the existence of God is that scientifically we cannot prove God exists. However, some scientists like Einstein have claimed that God is an impersonal mysterious, intelligent power that science has yet to comprehend, a mystery yet to be solved. Max Plank, the father of quantum physics, described God this way, “We must assume behind this force [that holds both a solar system

and an atom together, there is] the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter.” Another scientist, Francis Collins who led the Human Genome Project, said this about the project’s discoveries, “We have caught the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God.” The God of Job would agree. “Yes! I came up with the blueprint and the measurements. I know where Light and Darkness live. I command the Dawn to, ‘Get to work!’”

The Creator God, the All-powerful God described by these scientists is also the same God that Jesus shares with us and reveals even more to us about God. For Jesus, God is not impersonal, but is relational like the relationship a father may have with his child. The first glimpse we get of this relationship is when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with the words, “Our Father.” In fact, the word Jesus actually uses is, “Abba,” which is an even more the informal term, “Daddy.” Jesus invites us to know the God who created solar systems, atoms, and DNA to also be the God who is a loving, caring parent. We can feel comfortable asking God to provide for our needs, to forgive us when we do wrong, and to protect us from evil. In this prayer we come to know the personhood of God who creates, knows everything, is caring, and loves us with all creation. This personhood of God is reflected in our personhood. The Creation story in Genesis 1 tells us that God made each of us in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. Each person on the face of the earth has the image of God in them. We each reflect the creativity, beauty, love, and majesty of the One who created us. We are all special to God. Jesus then assures us that God will answer our prayers. He encourages us to ask, seek, and knock on heaven’s door. A parent who loves a child will do all that they can to meet the child’s needs and make them happy. This is who God is for those of us who believe. God is Protector, Provider, Merciful, Creator, and Ruler of the Universe.

Remember the questions asked earlier? Does our belief in God shape our values, how we live, what careers we choose, which life partner we choose, how we parent, what we do in retirement, what we do with our time, money, and talents? I believe that our belief in God does shape us and helps us make choices that are in keeping with honoring all of God’s creation, people included. Perhaps it is because we were created in the image of God that humans have the capacity to rise above the laws of natural selection. Because we believe in a compassionate, relational God, we have compassion and care for the weak, the struggling, and the oppressed rather than weeding them out. We believe that each person is special to God. This belief may influence our political views. This belief may motivate us to spend time helping those in need, or speaking out against injustices for our neighbors, or giving to a cause that will assist them. Our belief in the Creator God who loves like a parent does shape how we both see and care for God’s world.

How did you come to believe in God? Here is my story. As a child I was taught to believe in God and was taken to church to learn about God. When I was in college I claimed not to believe in God, however, God planted a seed in me during that time. A college friend of mine would catch snowflakes, put them under a microscope, and take pictures of them. As I looked over her many photographs, not only did I notice that no two snowflakes are alike, but I observed how intricate and elaborate each snow crystal was. Each was a work of art in itself. The seed God planted in me made me aware that there must be a power somewhere that can create each snowflake to be so delicate and unique. A few years later as I was struggling with the growing pains of adulthood, I realized that even though the universe was vast and I was smaller than a speck of dirt in comparison, God not only loved me and cared for me like a parent does for a child, but God knew me intimately. God knew every part of me, every thought, every emotion, every struggle, every moment of joy. God knew me because God created me to be as unique and beautiful as the snowflakes. So I came to believe in God, an Almighty Parent, Creator of Heaven and Earth which includes little ole me and you, too. How did you come to believe in God?

**Resources:** *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why* by Adam Hamilton; *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1* by Justo Gonzalez