

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

21st February 2021 – First Sunday of Lent

1 PETER 3:18-22

WHAT IS OUR HOPE?

Question: What did you do last weekend?

We get this question a lot from friends and work colleagues and classmates. What kinds of things normally come up for you here? When you talk about your weekend are you excited, or do you sometimes think, ‘oh yeh, same old same old’? How often do you mention going to church? And if you have, how do you then explain why you do that, what your faith means to you? when you say, ‘I went to church’ or ‘I am a Christian’, how then do you respond to the question which often comes afterwards: ‘why?’? It is not often that we are questioned about of faith or why we believe and often I have stumbled over the answer.

Peter, in this letter is trying to help us formulate a reply to these questions. In verse 15 he says “always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”

If somebody asked you “What is the reason you are so hopeful?” Would you reply with the apostle’s creed? Probably not, but let’s have a look at it.

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 hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty, from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

It is a bit stuffy isn’t it, and it does not feel genuine when we quickly quote something we memorised in Sunday school. But this is the standard creed that the Christian church has been using for about 1700 years. Officially, this is what we believe.

In our reading today Peter gives us a creed in his own words. 1 Peter 3:18-22

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when

Vicar Ben Graham

God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

So, this then is Peter's personal testimony, the reason for the hope that he has in Christ Jesus. Peter's first confession was much simpler though, and much easier to remember. In Matthew 16 Jesus asks the disciples, "*But who do you yourselves say that I am?*" *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Each time we make a confession and answer the question of "What is our Hope" it is important to consider the context, why we are being asked what we believe and who we are speaking to. For this reason, our Church has three different ecumenical creeds.

Very early in the history of Christianity there were misunderstandings about who Jesus was and what he did. For example, some people did not believe Jesus really died and lots did not believe that Jesus was both human and divine.

Around 320AD there was a man named Arius who had a lot of influence in the early church but he attempted to explain the relationship between God the Father and the Son with the creed "there was a time when he was not." Arius taught that Jesus was a created being like us and that by nature he was not divine. This was the impetus for the Nicene creed. All the church leaders from around the world gathered together to discuss how to better explain who Jesus is.

Let us hear a little what our church believes about Jesus from the apostles and Nicene creeds.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, (Apostles Creed, 2nd article)

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; (Nicene Creed 2nd article)

And this was even further expanded in the Athanasian creed, the really long repetitive one. If somebody asked me at the beach what I did on the weekend, why I go to church and what I believe there is no chance I would recite the Athanasian creed. But it is useful if want to clearly explain the Trinity, to show someone that we do not believe in three separate Gods.

Then in 1580 the Lutheran's all got together to write this book. It's Huge, when do you think a confession this size and thoroughness would be useful?

Each of these creeds to a long time to write, discuss and agree on. Because they were meant to represent all of the Christian church and also to deny a lot of misunderstandings. When one of our friends or family ask about our faith we do not need to be this precise, and each one of us will express the hope that we have in Christ in a different way. But our confessions should always be scriptural.

There are many people who claim to be Christian and have a creed, like Arius. But when their creed contradicts what is written in the Bible, God's word how can they then be a Christian? It is for this reason that our church serviced always have readings from the Bible. This is where our faith comes from. Our Creed's are supposed to function as a clear and concise explanation of what the bible teaches us about God, So that we can communicate what Jesus has done for us. This is why we have a spoken or sung creed here every week.

When a sermon is preached you should expect it to always have a foundation in the Bible. We don't come to church to hear a pep talk or tips on raising children. We come to church to receive God's forgiveness and receive clear teaching from the bible.

Augsburg Confession VII: The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught, and the Sacraments are rightly administered. (BCKW p43)

And so, for this reason, to ensure that the message of Jesus "*The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*" is communicated clearly, we always confess our creed. Sometimes we have our creed between the readings and the sermon, otherwise the first thing after the sermon is our confession of faith. This is to keep me accountable, to keep our pastors scriptural and to avoid sermons that obscure that gospel message. The message that Jesus Christ, son of God died for you so that your sins would be forgiven.

What next?

This week I challenge you to listen for that question, “What did you do last weekend?”

For most people the weekend is a day of rest, a sabbath from five days of hard work. They are curious how you have refreshed and recharged, how have you prepared for another week. This can be a great opportunity to speak about what Jesus Christ has done for you in your life, and also to remind yourself of the hope that you have in Christ Jesus.

How can you frame your answer between the Bible and our confessions? How will you express your creed into that context? How will you show the world that you heard the word’s of Peter?

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:15)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

We Believe ...

Without using a Bible; How might you explain what you believe and the reason for the hope that you have in Jesus in the following contexts?

- Imagine you are at the beach, making small talk with a stranger while waiting for your turn to rinse the sand off your feet. They comment how great the weather was last Sunday morning and ask if you also went to the beach then.
- Imagine that you met an old school friend that you have not seen in years, You just both went to the local shop to get milk for breakfast, they ask “Do you still do that church thing?”
- Imagine it’s Monday lunchtime and as you are preparing your meal somebody asks “What did you do on the weekend?”

Their hope is in ...

When you have heard somebody else’s testimony or confession; have you ever thought “well that’s not the Jesus I believe in.”? What are some ways that people show that they do not believe in our Jesus?

Between the Bible and the Creeds

Considering your answers to those questions; Where might you go in the Bible to justify your creed? Or to correct and teach others about Jesus Christ?

Vicar Ben Graham
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