

“The Apostles’ Creed”

Midweek Lent 2

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins . . . that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” - 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

A rudder on a ship or an airplane is a necessary piece of equipment used to direct its course. A rudder is often attached to some sort of steering device that allows the pilot to keep the ship or aircraft on its designated course. Without a rudder a ship or a plane wanders aimlessly. Without a rudder on a ship it is very difficult to stay on course and operate the ship or aircraft effectively and efficiently. Without a rudder a ship or aircraft can be a very dangerous and hazardous piece of machinery that can be harmful to all those around. Being rudderless is reckless!

I call to mind the image of a rudder this evening because it is at least one helpful way of understanding the purpose of a Christian creed. This evening we continue our midweek Lenten sermon series on the chief parts of Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*. Last week we considered the Ten Commandments and connected the meaning of them to Ash Wednesday in order to proclaim the one who resurrects the ashes and reverses the curse for us. This week we consider the Apostles’ Creed and more specifically, the purpose of a creed.

We can understand the purpose of a creed by comparing it to a rudder and its purpose. Simply put a creed is a summary statement of beliefs. It comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.” And so a person can have all kinds of creeds. Some are formal and some are informal. Some are written and others are just verbal. Some are explicit and others are implicit.

In the Christian Church some denominations have chosen not to make use of formal, written creeds to express the teachings of the Christian Faith. However, here at Atonement Lutheran and as part of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we use of the three ecumenical creeds that have been a part of the Church for centuries. We believe these creeds helpfully summarize what the Bible teaches and what the one, true Christian Church throughout the ages teaches. We know these creeds as the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We can find all three of them in the *Lutheran Service Book* in our pew racks. We even say them together here in our Worship Services at various times.

Tonight we especially focus on the Apostles’ Creed. It is believed to have been written around the 2nd century. It accurately expresses the teachings of the Apostles that we find in our Scripture readings this evening. It accurately expresses the teachings of the whole of the Bible.

So how does a creed, specifically the Apostles' Creed, function like a rudder for Christians and the whole Christian Church? To help answer that question I want to share a personal experience I had. I may have told this story before. If you have heard it before I ask for your patience because it is relevant.

One time when I was visiting a parishioner at a convalescent home where she is staying I was approached by another resident who saw me wearing my collar. She walked up to me and asked quite directly, "You're a Lutheran? What do you believe? What do Lutherans believe?" These were the interrogating questions. Yet, I had a true and concise response for her right on the tip of my tongue. I said, "Ma'am, Lutherans believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . ." I gave her the whole Apostles' Creed! When I was finished she said, "Oh, can we talk?"

The Apostles' Creed summarizes the true teachings of the Bible and of the Christian Faith in a helpful way. It summarizes them in a way that provides you and me as Christians with a helpful tool. Specifically, the Apostles' Creed provides us with a rudder. The Creed can then be used to guide us through the Scriptures and make sure we are staying on the true and faithful course. It can guide us and give us direction as we sort through the main teachings of Christianity, the Bible, and our Triune God. The Apostles' Creed can guide us through Spirit-filled conversations that we have about our Christian Faith with the many others we have relationships with and come in contact with on a daily basis. We confess that we believe in the true triune God who is three persons in one being. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is to say he is also the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier who makes us Holy.

As an individual Christian and together as a Christian congregation it is helpful to have a durable and tested rudder in the creeds that can serve as a guide and give direction. For, consider some of the alternatives. Consider having an untested or weak rudder. Consider even being rudderless!

I recently saw a movie titled *Rudderless*. In my opinion the title accurately described the lives of some of the characters. The film focuses primarily on the father of a college student who was killed in a campus shooting at the very beginning of the movie. The viewer learns about the life of the father who was climbing the corporate ladder quite successfully before the death of his son. Soon after his son's death he sold his expensive home, cars, and many other possessions. He bought a boat, docked it, and started living on it. He took up a new job painting houses. He took up a new habit as well, numbing his pain through the abuse of beer and alcohol. The title of the movie describes how the screenwriter wants us to view the father and his life after the death of his son: "rudderless." He seems to be aimless, with no purpose, drifting to and fro. And he is a hazard to all around him. While living a rudderless life he causes all sorts of havoc. The viewer learns that living rudderless is reckless!

In the film it was a misguided, selfish, evil, and sinful action committed by a college student who was probably quite rudderless himself that led to even more disorder, chaos, misguidedness, selfishness, evil, and sinfulness in the lives of those around him.

Isn't that the problem of human Sin? Sin can lead us to reject authority, especially God's authority over our lives. Rejecting God and his Word to provide us direction, guidance, comfort, and hope, we either search for other untested, weak rudders, or we seem to just live rudderless. We might aimlessly wander around doing whatever makes us feel good in the fleeting moment. We wander, oblivious to the havoc and damage we are causing as we seek to fulfill our desires and pleasures. We ignore the words of warning and caution by others who see the damage we are doing to ourselves and others. Living rudderless is reckless!

It is to rudderless lives and a rudderless world that a concise summary of the true teaching of the Holy Scriptures speaks. The words proclaim to us the one true, Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A Creed like the Apostles' Creed proclaims for us our God and his good news, the Gospel. He is our God who created us and all of creation. He is our God who worked within human history, in the fullness of time, to ransom us and all of creation from the power of Sin and death to render our lives rudderless, on a crash course toward eternal separation from him. He is our God who works through his Spirit to create and sustain the gift of faith within you and bring you into the ship of the Church, his holy ark, with Christ as the anchor.

A summary of the Christian Faith like the Apostles' Creed helpfully proclaims the one and only true God who can give your life true meaning. He can give you a true, lasting and confident identity in Christ. He can truly keep you safe and secure now in this life and unto eternity through his Son. True meaning, identity, security, purpose, and direction are found only in the triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the same one who is proclaimed boldly, clearly, and concisely in the Apostles' Creed. And for this reason the Christian Church has found it useful. For this reason you and I can find it a helpful guide as we sail through this life and into the next safely in the ark of the Church—safely in Christ. Amen.