

PRAYING LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM – Lesson 3 - "The Apostles' Creed" 7-30-17

Trinity Lutheran Church Norman, OK. Pastor David Nehrenz

Scripture Texts:

**Matthew 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-31; Luke 9:18-22; John 20:26-31;
1 Cor 12:3; 15:1-8; Php 2:5-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Titus 3:4-7; Jude 3;**

Luther recognized the ancient priority of what we have come to know as the Apostles' Creed: "The first symbol, that of the apostles, is truly the finest of all. Briefly, correctly, and in a splendid way it summarizes the articles of faith, and it can easily be learned by children and simple people."¹ Because it was the briefest and most ecumenical confession of Christendom—and it was used in the primitive church for baptismal catechesis—it was natural for Luther to use this creed for the instruction of the baptized in the trinitarian faith.² As Hermann Sasse reminds us, the Creed is like all Christian confession: a response to revelation telling us "objectively of facts, not of subjective experiences."³)

The Apostles' Creed is an unpacking of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). It is the summary of "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Creed "is the summation of the Gospel; when it is confessed, the triune God Himself places the description of His saving acts in one's mouth, so that we can confess faith in Him thereby and can find refuge for our faith in those words

We can only call on the name of the Lord in prayer because the Spirit has first called us by the Gospel to faith in Christ Jesus.

Without the Spirit's work in the Gospel, we cannot by our own reason or strength come to Christ. Here, because he sets the phrase in the present tense, Luther is not limiting the Spirit's work to conversion or to the initial coming to faith. I could not believe much less pray for even a moment were it not for the Holy Spirit who continues to work faith and preserve me in this faith through the word of the cross.

The Third Article comforts Christians who struggle to pray as it reminds us that faith is not grounded in the self but in the sure and certain work of the Holy Spirit, who brings us to confess Christ (by the potency of the Gospel). As Jeffrey Silcock puts it: "Strictly speaking, Christians do not 'possess' the Spirit, but the Spirit 'possesses' them."³² This is the comfort beyond all telling of which Luther has us sing:

We all confess the Holy Ghost,
Who, in highest heaven dwelling
With God the Father and the Son,
Comforts us beyond all telling;
Who the Church, His own creation,
Keeps in unity of spirit.
Here forgiveness and salvation
Daily come through Jesus' merit.
All flesh shall rise, and we shall be
In bliss with God eternally. (LSB 954:3)

"Luther's whole exposition of the Creed proceeds in terms of divine giving."³³ The Spirit enlightens us with His gifts so that we confess the treasures of redemption procured by the Son and in Him rejoice in the riches of the Father's favor expressed in all of His provisions for body and soul. In this way Luther teaches us to pray each article of the Creed in praise and thanksgiving to the triune God.

THE FIRST ARTICLE

Creation

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

Almighty Maker of heaven and earth: We give You thanks for the gift of our creation in body and soul. You are the giver of eyes, ears, and all our members. You have endowed us with our reason and senses, and in Your mercy You take care of us. For what we need to support this body and life—food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land and animals, and all that we have—You richly and daily provide. In Your kind care You defend us against all danger and guard and protect us from all evil. All this You do out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us. So we implore You, gracious God, to give us faith to acknowledge Your benefits, tongues to thank and praise Your holy name, and lives joyfully given to serve and obey You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

THE SECOND ARTICLE

Redemption

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, died and was 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.

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord,

who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,

that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

Lord Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, You have redeemed us lost and condemned persons. For purchasing and winning us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with Your holy, precious blood and with Your innocent suffering and death, we give You thanks. We praise You that You have made us Your own so that we may live under You in Your kingdom and serve You in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as You are risen from the dead and live and reign to all eternity with Your Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE THIRD ARTICLE

Sanctification

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.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Lord Jesus, we cannot believe in You by our own reason or strength or come to You, but Your Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and kept us in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with You in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, the Holy Spirit daily and richly forgives us all our sins. On the Last Day, He will raise all the dead and give all of us who believe in You eternal life. For this we praise You and implore You according to Your promise to send us the Comforter that we might continue firm in this confession. For You live and reign with Him and the Father, one God, now and forever. Amen.
