

Christ revealed in our actions - Following is a verb
Matthew 4:12-23
Rev. Sharon Smith

Curtis Almquist – The 12 days of Christmas – The gift of redemption

Brother Curtis Almquist from the SSJE describes an instance where a man came to see him to talk about his beliefs as a Christian. He spoke more about what he could no longer believe. He named a whole list of stuff that he couldn't actually buy any longer. He presumed that Brother Curtis would challenge him and make him feel guilty. Instead, he just listened to his list and eventually Brother Curtis said: "Why don't you forget it all? Forget all this religion stuff. That was then; this is now. Why don't you give yourself wholeheartedly to something like rose gardening, or gourmet cooking or hang gliding? It sounds like you need to get a life!"

The man was shocked – Monks are not supposed to say such things. He said: I can't walk away from my religious faith. What is going on inside of him, he asked.

I said he probably did believe something about God, or he would not have known his doubts. I told him that the something was probably God or was of God. If your former experience of God no longer has enough meaning for you, if it is too small, too pedestrian, too local, too convenient, then translate it. Find some new language to speak out of the depths of your soul, lest you confuse your experience of God or your thoughts of God, as God. God is always more. God comes to us from the future. If God is not something more – in ways beyond which you have thought or imagined or experienced – then God will likely be something created in your own image.

In Matthew 4 we read an account of men, active in life, in a context working their nets. Some casting them in the sea, some mending them for the next nights work.

Jesus calls to them and they act. They follow...

Faith is a verb. It is not a belief. It is a step we take in our current situation – be it in the washroom, in the kitchen, in the class room, in traffic or in a coffee shop.

John Caputo

"Beliefs are part of our inherited religious identity, making up the various creeds. Beliefs are the positions we inherit from our culture and they can be given the form of propositions to which fellow Christians all nod in consent."

"Belief is to be distinguished from faith ... We can unplug from a religious belief altogether. But faith is a more underlying matter... Faith has to do with a deeper fidelity, a deeper responsibility

to what is calling upon or visiting itself upon us unconditionally, wherever we live and whatever we believe.

“When beliefs deepen, entrenchment sets in, fundamentalism waxes, searching wanes. When faith deepens, beliefs destabilize, searching waxes, fundamentalism wanes. Faith arises from a more obscure and distant call, it is an ambiguous solicitation, and a hope in an uncertain future.”

From Hope against Hope

So, what about creeds.

The definition of a creed is “a set of beliefs or aims which guide someone's actions”

In the book of Alternative Services (our current Anglican Prayer book in the Anglican Church of Canada) we are given several historical creeds for the Eucharist Service and for Morning Prayer.

Many of us in this room have significant difficulty with saying these creeds.

A creed is a set of belief which guides someone’s actions.

(1) The Apostles Creed:

- The Apostles' Creed is an early statement of Christian belief—a creed or "symbol"
- The Apostles' Creed is trinitarian
- Affirming belief in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- The Apostles' Creed was based on Christian theological understanding of the canonical gospels, the letters of the New Testament and to a lesser extent the Old Testament. Its basis appears to be the old Roman Creed known also as the Old Roman Symbol.
- The earliest known mention of the expression "Apostles' Creed" occurs in a letter of AD 390 from a synod in Milan and may have been associated with the belief, widely accepted in the 4th century, that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each of the Twelve Apostles contributed an article to the twelve articles of the creed.

(2) Nicene Creed:

- Outlines a picture of God – Monotheistic – without bodily form – all that is, seen and unseen.
- Fourth Century Creed – developed out of a controversy – who is Jesus? The real humanity and the real divinity of Jesus? How do you put that together with monotheism with One God?
- The Nicene Creed is strictly speaking the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed” and was first developed following the First Council of Nicaea in 325. It was held to combat a theological error called Arianism (from its principal proponent, a priest named Arius) that denied the divinity of Christ.
- A Creed was developed to affirm the teachings of the Church and was further refined at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. It expanded on previous Creeds in order to be more precise in what the Church believed.
- How do we identify Jesus with God, if there can only be one God?

- It is the affirmation of trinitarian theology – One God, three persons.

Where these creeds are helpful are that they situate us in the flow of Christian thought...

- Helpful – give us a long view of time, remind us of our history. Peter Elliot, retired Dean of Christ Church Cathedral is known to say: “Let us affirm the faith of the church by reciting the theological imagery developed at Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381 CE”
- But they do not guide us in our actions.
- In fact scholars talk about the **great coma**.... It begins with Jesus’ miraculous birth and then moves straight to his trial before Pilate, without saying anything of his life. Did all the things that Jesus said and did not count for much? This is the person who we are invited to follow and to imitate...

- (3) **The Shema** – reminds us that we are hearing people (positioned to listen first), listen to this God, One God, unified.
And then it proceeds to guide our actions.. love it says... love...

(4) The Baptismal Creed (10am we are saying an abbreviated form right now):

- Reminds us we are created (God is God and we are not)
- Brings Jesus humanity and divinity together and our need of Jesus life, model, death and resurrection
- Reliant on the Spirit
- And then asks us questions about our actions:
- Continue in fellowship, break bread, respect all people, strive for justice, care for the earth...
- Our abbreviated form leads us into silence. Where like the Shema, we listen. We consider what it means for God to be with us... Emmanuel, Christ among us in presence and not in words alone.

Cynthia Bourgeois describes a 10 second sermon given by a Monk, following a reading of the Matthew 4.

He repeated the sentence:

“At once they left their nets and followed him”

And he added:

“Would that we might do the same. Untangle ourselves and just follow”

From The Wisdom Jesus

And as we follow we embody Christ to others.

Let us hear from Chris – an encounter in the Philippines that deepened his faith.