

“Creed: I Believe in God”

Date: July 1, 2018

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Exodus 3:1-15; Romans 1:18-20; Psalm 8

Occasion: Creed, series

Theme: God

Do you know what you believe as a Christian? Can you tell someone else *why* you believe? For the month of July we'll be exploring the Apostle's Creed, an ancient but still current summary of what Christians believe.

The opening statement in the Apostles' Creed says: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and earth." But is there a God? How can we know? What evidence is there that God exists? Does it really matter one way or another? We'll talk about those questions this morning.

In the last 30 years, an increasing number of people reject the idea that there is a God. This growth in atheism has brought with it a number of vocal and at times hostile spokesmen who seek to demonstrate that belief in God is absurd, anti-intellectual, even dangerous, and that the world needs to be rid of it.

My sermon this morning will offer reasons for our faith in God, but I doubt that it will persuade the die-hard atheist. Precisely because the nature of faith is that of choosing to believe. One weighs the evidence and then makes a choice of what to believe. The atheist and the Christian see the same evidence and come to very different conclusions. But I think it's important to know what we believe, and why, and why it matters.

Many would be willing to use the term "God" when referring to the creative and powerful forces that gave rise to, and hold together, the universe as we know it – forces such as the mysterious "dark energy" of astrophysics.

When Einstein referred to God, it seems to me that he was willing to use the word in such a way, not as a personal being, but an impersonal power or force, or perhaps a mystery of science yet unsolved. But when Christians perceive God, they see not simply a force of nature, but an entity, a Being, that is both intelligent and powerful and caring.

Christians believe that God is the creative force, the power, the source from which everything that exists derives its existence and upon which all that exists is contingent. Twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich referred to God as *the Ground of Being*.

We see this idea in the name of God by which God reveals himself to Moses in Exodus 3. Moses wants to know God's name and God said to Moses, "I am Who I am. So say to the Israelites, *I Am* has sent you." This phrase, *I am Who I Am* is a Hebrew wordplay on the proper name Yahweh, or Jehovah, usually rendered in English as LORD. It means that God is the source of all that is, from which everything that is has come to be and continues to be.

This is where theology and physics might meet. Physicists talk about fundamental forces such as strong and weak gravity and electromagnetic forces. They speak of particles that permeate the universe and of such things as dark energy and dark matter, most of which cannot be seen and are not fully understood, but which play a critical role in forming and sustaining the universe as we know it.

Many physicists accept and use the term "God" as shorthand for describing the mysterious and invisible forces that govern the universe. But Christianity doesn't stop there. Christians also see God as a being with the attributes of personhood: intelligence, emotion, reason, logic and will.

The Creed, drawing from Jesus' primary way of addressing God,

speaks of God as Father, a very intimate and relational term. Scripture even says that human beings were made in the image of God. So, when we look at the universe we see not just a bunch of random functioning forces, but a reflection of the creativity, the joy, the beauty and the majesty of the One who created.

When we look for the evidence of God, we point to the Creation itself. One of the fundamental arguments for God's existence is the fact that the universe exists. There is an incredible logic and ordering to the universe, that Christians believe could not have happened by mere chance, even over billions and billions of years. If there is a Creation, there must be a Creator.

As a Christian, I see God's glory and creativity throughout creation. It is one of the reasons I love to be out on my kayak almost every week that I can – to be close to the handiwork of the Creator. The atheist may look at the same thing and see the wonder of nature. And so, at some point we choose either to believe or to reject the idea that there is One whose power and mind have brought forth the cosmos.

Paul was the one who believed that the universe itself points to the existence of God. In Romans 1:20 he says, "Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – God's eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made."

Well, besides Creation, is there any other evidence that would cause one to believe in the existence of God? I believe in God, in part because I am. I think, reason, love and perceive. I believe that my very existence and yours too, points to something greater than we are.

I believe in God because of the thousands of moments spent in

prayer, scripture reading and reflection – when I’ve felt something, Someone offering comfort, assurance, guidance and grace. Something inside of me needs to trust, to give thanks, to praise and to worship One who is greater than myself.

In my life I often experience coincidences that seem to involve more than chance – intuitions to do something, to call someone, to go somewhere. Hundreds of times I’ve done the thing I felt nudged to do and I find myself in a place where I was needed, or where I needed to be.

I love to read two magazines, one called *Guideposts*, the other called *His Mysterious Ways*, that document stories in people’s lives where things happen and the simplest explanation points to something or Someone that is beyond themselves and is very real. Call them coincidences if you will. Many of us call them God-incidents, others call them miracles.

None of what I’ve just shared proves God’s existence. I’m sure you could poke holes in my arguments. We each weigh the same data and our experiences and we reach our own conclusions - upon which we build our convictions. Based on my own personal experiences I choose to “believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

So, if one accepts that belief in God is reasonable and consistent with our observations of the universe, what difference does it make? - For many people, very little. They are content to say, “I believe in God,” but their lives are not affected in any way. I refer to these folks as “practical atheists.” While they confess an intellectual assent to believing in God, they go about their daily lives as though there is no God.

But belief, in the sense that the Creed intends, is not merely intellectual assent to an idea. It permeates our being and affects the way we live. So if we truly believe in God, what does it matter?

Well, if there is a God, then we as creatures are not nearly as important as we might think. It creates a certain humility about our lives. Interestingly, so does the world view as held by scientists. According to both views, each of us is quite small in the grand scheme of things.

But a belief in God adds something to our smallness. We *are* small and seemingly insignificant in the scheme of things, and yet we matter to God. Scripture not only speaks of God as Father, but of us as God's children. Christianity tells us that we are known and even loved by God.

The Bible teaches us that we have value and worth as human beings. We are not to kill one another. We are to treat one another as we wish to be treated. We are to love one another. Why? Because we are all children of God and are all part of God's human family. We all matter to God.

Second, if there is a God and you and I are God's creatures, then the appropriate response is praise, gratitude and worship. We are to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength.

Belief in God also has huge implications for our care of Creation. If God created all things and the earth belongs to God, then we are stewards, or caretakers of it. We are given the gift of Creation to use, but we must not exploit it or destroy it. It belongs to God.

Finally, if God exists, then my aim in life is to understand God's will for my life and how I am to live as a human being. Christians find God's will in studying the Scriptures, particularly the life and teachings of Jesus. To be authentically human is to know God's will and do it. By doing this we will find a deep satisfaction in life.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth." How about you? Let us stand and sing of our faith, "How Great Thou Art."

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Creed: What Christians Believe and Why*, by Adam Hamilton, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, pp. 17-34.