

Creed-I Believe in God

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Every now and then, especially walking along a busy street, the smell of car exhaust will take me back to Sunday morning in Jakarta. I'm five years old, dressed in my uncomfortable Sunday best—already dripping with sweat in the humidity of the tropics, heading into the community church, holding my mom's hand as she walks my siblings and I across the street. We get inside and find a row of metal folding chairs—and my legs stick to it when they dismiss all the kids to Sunday School halfway through the service. The Sunday School classroom is more of a covered patio, with bamboo mats on the floor and a Noah's Ark playset with pieces missing. The fans were constantly running but it never seemed to help, and neither did the little cup of Tang they would have available after service. It was there, in that hot and humid community church in

Jakarta—with its metal folding chairs, bamboo mats, spinning fans and little cups of tang—where I first heard those words, spoken in rhythm...

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

I am a long way from Jakarta and those bamboo mats—although the weather is pretty similar. And though I have been to many different churches since, the words of the Apostles' Creed have remained—but that doesn't mean they have stayed exactly the same across the years.

After a while, I came to memorize those words, to say them and believe them. Innocent and childlike, I simply saw the Creed as something that I said in order to belong to the church. I saw the Creed as something I said to prove I believed in God—without question.

But I have noticed, and maybe you have noticed this too, that just when everything seems simple and straightforward—life is good and everything seems to be working out—we discover that everything we thought we knew—doesn't work anymore, and we have to reevaluate everything. We start seeing how things can be complex and full of questions and uncertainty.

The moment of hurt and betrayal and the broken heart. The moment of helplessness when a loved one gets sick. The moment when everything seems to fall apart, when the world gets turned upside down and its hard to get back up. The moment when it feels like God is absent or silent.

But the words are still there—"I believe in God..." and we notice something else.

A new day dawns, life goes on—new life, with new depth and new horizons, with new opportunities to discover and explore. The broken heart heals. We discover that the God we thought was absent or silent has been with us all along and trust grows in our hearts.

We see that the world is full of confusion and simple truths, uncertainty and peace, sorrow and joy—and God is with us through all of it.

God has not changed since those days in Jakarta, but I have changed, lived, loved, lost, and grown.

As my understanding of God has changed over the years, so has my understanding of the Creed, “I believe in God.”

I can imagine that the Apostle Paul may have reflected on how his understanding of God changed throughout his life, as he unfurled a piece of parchment to compose this letter to the church in Rome.

Maybe the smell of the linen parchment before him brought him back to the synagogue he grew up in, and the smell of the scrolls of Torah where he read about the God who created heaven and earth.

Or maybe he remembered sitting in the lap of his mother as she taught him what it meant to love God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Maybe Paul remembered afternoons in the workshop with his father, learning by heart the story of the time when God set their ancestors free from slavery in Egypt— and dwelled with them and walked with them as they wandered in the wilderness.

Maybe Paul remembered his time as a religious fanatic who was so certain about what he believed that it led him to persecute and harm others. Maybe he remembered the moments of pain and loss that caused him to question everything, the times when he felt helpless and alone. Or the times when God seemed silent.

Or maybe he was thinking of the moment when his entire life turned upside down on the road to Damascus—when he discovered that everything he thought he knew didn’t work anymore, and he had to reevaluate everything.

I would be willing to bet though, that at the front of Paul’s mind, more than anything else, are those memories of when he discovered that through it all God was still there.

Those moments when Paul could see that God is love, the moments when he felt his heart strangely warmed until it was melted all the way through.

Paul wrote this passage to the Romans to share the love of God with the early church so they could reframe their own experiences. He wanted to help them see that signs of God’s love were all around them.

God's love was with them through the times when things were simple and the times when things got complicated.

The One who made the heart knows when they are heartbroken. The One whose word brought light and life into existence knows when their sighs are too deep for words and sighs with us. God does not abandon them, God dwells with them. And in the midst of their suffering, God's love is at work for good—bringing peace, bringing healing, bringing new life.

Through misty and tear-filled eyes, he wrote this passage to help them see with faith and trust that nothing—**neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.**

Paul wrote to the Romans because he trusted the love of God, and he believed that when we see that nothing can separate us from God's love, we can see everything through the eyes of faith. And that is what we mean when we say, "I believe in God."

By saying I believe in God, I am saying that I trust that at the heart of all things is love. I am saying that our lives, that the world, is full of meaning and depth and that beauty exists all around us and within us—even in hot metal folding chairs, ineffective ceiling fans, and tiny cups of tang. I am saying that at the end of the day, love and life will have the last word.

For me, the words of the Creed are now more than just a litmus test to determine if I am part of the group. They are more than just statements that I believe with without questioning. I can agree with them or disagree with them, either way they help me to see with eyes of faith. If I say I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, then that will change how I look at everything else. I think that it is why it is important for us to say the creeds of the church together—and to reflect on what they mean for us today.

That means we can look at the people who cause us frustration or anger with kindness—because they are made in the image of God too.

We can look at the situations that give us anxiety with patience—because we know that even in our weakness, God's love is there.

We can look at the moment of heartbreak and loss with resilience—because we know that in all things God is working for the good. Even in those moments when we feel separated from God, we know that God is there, inviting us to experience unending love again, and again, and again, and again.

Because how we see God changes how we see everything else.

And perhaps most importantly, it means that we can look around and really see.

We can see the people who are struggling to find direction and meaning in their lives.

We can see the child who is struggling to make sense of the loss of their parent.

We can see those who feel like they have been abandoned, or that everything is hopeless, or that God is silent...

... and we can offer them hope and trust.

We can be the ones who sit with them in the silence, when their sighs are too deep for words.

We can work together with them for the good.

We can be the ones who connect others to the love of God—so that they can experience the love of God through us.

And so, no matter where we are in our faith journey, the question we are left with is this—where will we see God's love today? Whether we know the words of the creed or not—whether we believe in the words of the creed or not—the question we are asked is this: how will we see everything else?