

Sermon 15/09/24 The Creed Session 14

If our journey through the creed was the train trip to London, we would by now have considered the trinity at Leamington Spa and the ascension at High Wycombe. We will have spotted forgiveness among the tube trains at West Ruislip and are now close to the driver applying the brakes as we approach Marylebone. Over the past three months we have explored the individual elements that make up the creed, each preacher in their own way. Some with an emphasis on the topic, others concentrating more on the detail of the connected readings. We have shaken out the dusty corners as we have thought about the elements of the whole.

Just as a reminder, or in case you missed week one, the creed is the statement of belief put together after a number of church councils in the fourth century. It was at the instigation of the Roman emperors who were concerned that the various beliefs of different parts of the church made a rather chaotic whole and wanted something more orderly.

But why are we making this trip anyway? Is there a danger that we will become engrossed in the detail and forget the main point? One of the participants on the safeguarding training I did this week reminded us all during our discussion, and as is set out in today's gospel reading 'God so loved the world'. What we do is about showing, sharing and celebrating his love for us.

God so loved the world that he sent his son. The detail of the creed leads us through the ways in which God shows his love. In the beginning he made the earth and everything in it, crucially including us, humankind. And then there is Jesus, his Son, so clearly from the same source as the Father.

For our benefit God sent his Son, as a human, to be with us to show us how we could live. And then humans destroyed that life at the crucifixion. But the love of God was more powerful and on the third day Jesus became alive again before returning to his Father, leaving behind for us the Holy Spirit to continue to guide us.

Those of us who believe these things have formed the church, where here on earth we worship, we celebrate the love by passing it on to other people, and we live in the hope that we have all been given the gift of eternal life. Life after our time on earth has ended.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. Who would not want to share that message? But how do you share that in such a way that it makes sense to others? By showing not only that we are different but how we are different. Instead of appealing to any specific sector of the community we are there for everyone. At no point in the whole creed does it indicate that what we believe might in any way differ because of who we are. In fact

going back to the history that was part of the original reasoning, to have a common statement of belief for all the Christian groups.

Love, compassion, respect. Respect for the other groups in our complex world, understanding that we have different opinions, different values and that we need to try to understand that even where we cannot agree. Brought up in the 1960's against a background of feminism I was amazed this week to learn that in Greek the world for child has no gender. Until they were old enough for their gender to be important, no one was really interested. The idea that a child mattered so little that we were not interested in its gender is just so unimaginable today. But we are all different formed from different gene pools and in differing environments. The creed may give a framework for faith, but it is not ultra prescriptive: it allows for differing practices, different translations of scripture to help our understanding, that we will all worship within the places we find ourselves in. Before covid who would have thought that Sunday worship could be an online celebration in the Vicar's kitchen? No, not in our parish but certainly in others. Our eyes were suddenly opened to other possibilities.

Compassion for others. The idea is straightforward but how difficult to show it without being patronising, or showing our own prejudices. Everyone has their needs, not necessarily the obvious ones of people with issues around health or poverty. The celebrity lifestyle can be as isolating as that of the housebound, others actually yearn for some time without other people. In God's love we need to empathise with others whose inclinations are not the same as ours but who are just as entitled to feel that love.

Most of us here can think back to a time when through our anxiety or nervousness we felt that invisible arm around our shoulders, that inner voice saying, 'Go on, try it, all will be well', or just the feeling that we were being guided in a certain direction. It was, it is real. And when we follow that guidance the results can be often unexpected but always amazing.

The brakes are squealing, we are almost at the terminus, and it is time to reconnect with the purpose of our journey, to explore the detail of the Nicene creed. It is the story of God's formation and love of mankind Out of the detail comes one simple truth, 'God so loved the world...', and so should we.