

February 21, 2010

Houghton Lake United Methodist Church

## Where Did We Come From?

**Hebrews 11:1-3, 6**

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The Apostle's Creed has its roots deep into the early church. It was used of candidates at baptism, and this is still true in the United Methodist Service of Baptism you will find in your hymnal. The United Methodist Church has this to say concerning the creed:

[The Apostles' Creed] helps to preserve the integrity of the church's witness, set boundaries for acceptable Christian doctrine and proclaim the basic elements of the enduring Christian message.

We join with the universal Church across the ages in this historic affirmation of the Christian faith.

The Creed has long been used as an outline to teach the faith to baptismal candidates. In this series we will have a chance to brush up on the basics together. The Creed has been used in public and private worship as a response to hearing the word of God in scripture. In this series we will have the chance to make better use of the creed in our devotional life. The Creed is a statement of unity. It emphasizes not the differences between various churches but it states the faith we share together. In this series we will emphasize not what makes us different but what we share in common.

It begins with faith: *I Believe...* The Bible says "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) These days people are skeptical and cynical about most things: government, business, education, and yes, God. But did you know that we were born to believe? One of the things that make us different from all other living things is our capacity to believe.

What is faith? It is trust. The devil believes in God but he does not trust God. Faith does not just believe that a parachute will help you land safely if you jump out of a plane. Faith is putting on the parachute and jumping! It means trusting God to forgive your sins; to give your life meaning and to lead you to eternal life. If you have faith in God you will act with love towards him and towards others. Faith works by love and the first step in being a Christian is a working faith in God: a faith that shows itself in prayer, worship, studying the scriptures, showing mercy to others and doing good to all.

Our faith is in God the Father Almighty. We believe that God exists, not the God of the philosophers who is some unseen, unknowable intelligence behind the universe but a personal God who has come to us, introduced himself to us, and most importantly he has adopted us as his children. The Bible says in Galatians 3:26 that “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Believers are the adopted children of God. Jesus is God’s Son from eternity within the Holy Trinity. But we become God’s children by adoption. The adoption ceremony is by faith in Christ which we celebrate in baptism.

As members of God’s family we are now unlearning the ways of the world and learning the expectations and values of the new household we belong to. Years ago, when Karen and I were newlyweds, one of our great discussions was how to fold bath towels. Should the first fold be length wise or width wise? We came from separate households. We had numerous unconscious expectations of how things should be done. Suddenly like so many young couples we needed to unlearn the past, and learn to adapt to a new household with all new expectations. This is the ethical task of every Christian: first we are adopted by faith and then second we begin to adapt to our new household.

How is God our father? Jesus tells us that “God is Spirit” (John 4:24) He does not have gender. But Christianity is unique among all world religions in that we call God our heavenly Father. How did this happen? There are two main reasons: 1) Jesus prayed to God exclusively as his Father and he taught his followers to do the same. Hence the Lord’s Prayer begins “Our Father...” 2) The Christmas story makes it clear that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus, God is, by virtue of the working of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. Thus God truly is Jesus’ Father. To be adopted by faith in Christ means that we get to use the same name for God that the Son of God uses which is Abba—the Aramaic word for “Dad”. As adopted children we also become heirs of the Father’s entire estate which would be heaven and earth and everything in them. It’s my job to tell you the good news this morning: You are rich!

This God is the maker of heaven and earth. Hebrews 11:3 states it, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed by God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” Only by faith can we truly understand the formation of the universe. Science can tell us only so much. The scientific consensus is that the universe did indeed have a beginning. Something came out of nothing—every scientist agrees with this. But only faith can answer the question as to *why* there was a beginning. We Christians believe in a Creator God who is the

author of life. Our story of creation is summed up very simply: In the beginning God spoke into the darkness and all things came to be through his word. Our faith does not contradict science but it includes and surpasses science to explain the deepest meaning of all things.

There is one more important thing to be noticed about the one true God: He is Trinity. The Bible everywhere speaks of the Trinity. In creation there is God the Father whose Spirit moves over the face of the waters and then the Word through which all things come to being. So we see a rough Trinity: God-Spirit-Word. At the baptism of Jesus there is God's voice from heaven, the Spirit descending like a dove, and Jesus identified as the beloved Son. Jesus commands us that the name of God into which we are to baptize is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Many people consider the Trinity to be one of the most bizarre parts of Christianity. It is an insurmountable intellectual obstacle that frustrates and repels people from embracing the faith. Another reaction people have is a fascination with the Trinity as some kind of great puzzle to be solved and they immerse themselves in study, thought and discussion as if the Trinity were the moral equivalent of a cross word puzzle or a set mathematical equations to be solved. Instead of an obstacle or a puzzle, I'd like to suggest to you that the Trinity is our great advantage in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world around us. It is the only way to explain how God became man and then gave us his Spirit.

I can't remember a time in my life when I did not believe in the idea of a God, but I can tell you when God became personal to me. I was 15 years old—a middle class white boy from the suburbs. I spent a week in Kentucky with my youth fellowship putting floors in the cabin of an elderly couple who had lived on dirt all their lives. I had never seen such poverty. At the end of the week as we sang around the campfire and shared Holy Communion together; Jesus became real to me. He spoke to me and said that what I had been doing all that week was how he wanted me to live my whole life. Then I knew God was no idea, no empty philosophy, he was in Jesus. And Jesus was no dead Palestinian rabbi, he is the living Lord and he had given me his Spirit to be with me forever. The whole course of my life was altered in that moment.

Faith comes into your life because you want it. Faith comes into your life because you ask for it, "Lord, help me believe!" And faith in God will turn your life inside out and you will never be the same again. This is what it means to say the words, "I believe..."