

I BELIEVE IN GOD
First in a series: "Belief in a Post-modern World"
July 13, 2014 Isaiah 64: 8-9
The Church of the Covenant

I remember the most controversial thing I ever did in any of the churches I have served was the thing I thought was the simplest, no-brainer ever. I proposed to the Worship Committee of that church that we say "The Apostle's Creed" on an every Sunday basis. Generally speaking, we here in Western PA have been doing this for years so it isn't a new or radical things at all. But in that "inside the Washington D.C. beltway culture" in that church to stand up and say "I believe" was a very radical thing indeed. "Nobody's going to tell me what to say or believe!", they'd say. "What if I don't believe some statement in the Apostles' Creed do I still have to say it?" "What if I don't even want to stand up for it?" I had bumped into Post-modern culture with a vengeance. The fact that the church of Jesus Christ has believed these things from the inception; discussed debated and fought over them in detail, in fact; this had no bearing on their authority. So I preached a series on the Apostles' Creed, as I am now doing this July, and said that at the last Sunday I would invite folks to stand and to profess what they believe in the words that the church has historically believed. I gave folks permission to stand or not stand; I gave them permission to say the entire creed or just those portions they agreed with. The Sunday where we were first saying the Creed together came and I intoned the phrase: "And now would you please stand and affirm what you believe by reciting the Apostles' Creed." And for what seemed an eternity no one stood up. People were thinking, "Do I or do I not believe this?" I remember thinking to myself—"My Lord God, protect me; I am TOAST". And then a few people here and a few people there started to stand up, until most of the sanctuary had stood up, with perhaps the exception of a college professor or two. Post-modernism—"No one is going to tell me what to believe; I am going to believe what I want to believe. The heck with the church and what it thinks and believes."

The Apostles' Creed begins with the familiar words: "*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...*" "I believe" in Latin is "CREDO" so our CREDO in the church is what we say we believe and stand for; it defines what we DO believe and it also defines what we DO NOT believe. So I need to tell you at the outset that to stand up in today's world, which is in the thrall and servitude of a culture of Post-modernism and to say, "I believe in God..." is indeed a radical and courageous step. It is not like when I learned the Apostles' Creed back in Confirmation Class back in the late 1960's, as in, well, this is what everyone in the church believes. No, today a lot of people inside and outside the church do not believe in God, at least the God revealed in scripture, testified to by our Lord Jesus Christ, confirmed by the Confessions of the Church and professed by the church for 2,000 years.

He is "*God the Father Almighty*". God is both revealed by Jesus as being our Father; thus, indicating He is a person, not a concept, not a thought in our own brain, and that through Jesus Christ we may be adopted as His sons and daughters. He is a personal God, not an impersonal concept to be manipulated at will. He exists outside of time and culture because He is "Almighty". While certainly since Christ came there is a Christian ethic, God is not in the business of ethics apart from His person. "Father" says that He desires an intimate, personal, alive relationship with us. But to say this, takes nothing away from His other-ness, from His holiness, from Him being an *Almighty* God. Because of His might and power He is to be taken with deadly seriousness; we must not presume upon His fatherly kindness and forget that He exists quite apart from us and what He has said He means.

He is "maker of heaven and earth". The Post-modern world professes a belief in some God perhaps, but not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not the God of the Law and the prophets, not the God

revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ. The world believes in a generic God, a “choose what you want in God” kind of God, a malleable, re-shapable kind of God. Not the God who was and is and is to come. Not the God who is immutable, unchanging, omnipresent, HOLY and wholly other, all-knowing, and yet He is personal and immanent, present with us always. He who changeth not, He who is the GREAT I AM. The world may change; God never changes. The culture may change; God remains the same. The culture may try to reshape God into its own image; God will not be reshaped or remade into the image of His creation; God is the Creator. HE IS THE MAKER OF BOTH HEAVEN AND EARTH, not we, ourselves. “I want a smorgasboard God”, you may say. I want to pick and choose this or that to include in my view, my belief, in God. I want to take a vote and whatever the majority says is what God says; no way. I want to take an opinion poll, see what people believe about God, and then reshape myself, my church and my world into that image. No, God is the Creator and we are the creature. You may say, “I want to believe what I want to believe about God.” You say, Stu, that God is here to reshape me into the image of His Son; you say God is here to change and transform culture and our world, by His Son and by His Word, into His image; you say I don’t have any choice or say in what parts of God I believe in, I have to just accept God as God is, and has been, and forever will be. Well, Stu, I don’t believe in that kind of God...I’m not going to stand and say I profess that. Tough to say “I believe” in the context of today’s world, particularly when you have a preacher who will not “dumb God down” to the lowest possible denominator and make God so palatable to everyone and anyone’s opinion so that everyone, regardless of how they view God could stand up and say, “I believe in God”. No, the God of the Apostles’ Creed is the God of the law and the prophets, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who revealed Himself through the Word of God, the God of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is not a generic God; this is a very specific God, in whom we say we believe.

Post-modernists do not believe in ultimate, absolute truths. Our culture does not believe in true-truths that are true in every time and circumstance. By contrast there is the metaphysical world. There is a place where absolute truth exists; there is a place where justice is justice every time; there is a place where law and love coexist perfectly. These metaphysical categories, these transcendent realities that are set and immovable, are what are referred to when The Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe that God is the maker of heaven.” The scriptures point to those timeless, unchanging truths. The Confessions, like the Apostles’ Creed point to those timeless, unchanging truths. The Constitution points to a metaphysical, perfectly just law kept for us in heaven, by God the Father Almighty, MAKER of HEAVEN, MAKER of every category of goodness, truth and justice. Just say that at some cocktail party and be laughed out of the room. When we say, “I believe in God”, we are saying that I believe that God is the ultimate metaphysical category of existence, life and truth. We are saying, and not just some generic God, but a very precise God who revealed Himself through the Bible. And we are saying, by saying that He is the MAKER of HEAVEN, that everything which pertains to goodness, truth and life comes from those truths HE has set for us in heaven, in a realm beyond this world. And when we say, He is the MAKER of EARTH, we are saying, not only that He is Creator, but that the earth was created by God, to be a perfect reflection of heaven. Heaven comes down to earth and becomes reality, the Kingdom of God inbreaks into our world, through the God, the transcendent category above every transcendent category, in whom we believe.

I believe in God, not some generic, empty-headed view of God, but the God who God Himself revealed to us in scripture. I believe God is “the Father Almighty”; He is both a personal God that I can experience in the here and now but He is also to be respected, worshipped and followed because He is all-powerful. I believe God is the Maker of heaven; He has established truths beyond this life which no vote nor opinion poll can influence or change and has set absolute Truth in heaven to be known through the Word of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. And I believe that when we believe in the One True and Living

God, not some misshapen image of ourselves and our culture, that HE is the One who brings heaven down to earth, that HE is the One who transforms earth, who re-creates the earth, into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Heaven transforms earth, not the reverse. God transforms us, not we, Him.

Our scripture from Isaiah says: *"We are the clay, and Thou (God) art our potter."* (Isaiah 64: 8) When you stand and try to figure out whether you are going to say today, "I believe in God" I want to make it as plain as I can. Do you believe that God is the potter and He is here to reshape and transform our world and us personally? Or do you believe that we are the potter and we are here to reshape and transform God into our image and into the image of our culture? In archeology it is fascinating that they discover in the Middle East little hand held and handmade pieces of clay that are the gods of the culture. Throughout Canaanite and Philistine heathen culture, they dig a site and find these small gods, made of clay in wreckage of a former civilization. By the way, they also find them in Israel when Israel has fallen and gone after other gods, other than the One, true and Living God, revealed to them through the law and the prophets. That's how they can date the find --These little clay gods correspond to when the Bible says "Israel did evil in the sight of God"; self-made gods, lacking power, fashioned by clay and manipulated by the people were the sign of idolatry and the falling away of the people of God.

So, today you *do* have a choice. Will you stand and say, I believe that God is the potter and we are the clay? I believe that HE is the shaper and the re-shaper of my life, my church, my culture and my world. Or do you believe that He is a little lump of clay to be reshaped into our own image, a god-let who is not The Father Almighty, is not the Maker of heaven, is not the reshapener of earth, because He is just a little hunk of worthless clay, robbed of His Holy Power?

So, who will stand with me and say the words of the Apostles' Creed, and make a radical statement in today's world that you believe in God? Who will stand with me and say what the church has historically believed for 2,000 years about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost? Who will stand with me and say the Apostles' Creed?

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*