

Over the past 10 weeks we have been exploring some of the basic elements of Christian faith and discipleship, we have been exploring some of the basic frameworks for understanding the Story of God. We have explored worship – why and how we do it; we have explored prayer using the Lord’s prayer as a framework for understanding this crucial act of faith; and finally we are in the midst of exploring what we believe as Christians, using the Creeds as a framework to understand the Story of God better and how understanding this framework impacts our lives as a church and as disciples of Christ on a daily basis. Today we continue our series exploring the Creeds and turn to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ – the Son of God.

If the Trinity is the Christian doctrine which distinguishes Christianity from other religions, than Jesus is the figure which makes our discussions about the Trinity possible, but also necessary. Jesus is after all why we are gathered here today, Jesus is why we identify as ‘Christ-ians’, a word which derives from the Greek word *Χριστιανός* (*Christianos*), meaning followers or more accurately ‘slaves’ of Christ. We identify ourselves as belonging to Christ - strong language particularly in our culture which so emphasizes and prioritizes individual autonomy and freedom – and so understanding who this Christ is who we belong to is paramount to the task of discipleship. Since Jesus is (presumably) the reason we are here gathering to worship God in this particular way on a Sunday morning, it makes sense that our Creeds spend so much time focusing on him, focusing on his role in God’s Story: who he is, what he did, what he is doing and what he will do. This is perhaps one of the underappreciated strengths of the Creed, that each week it reminds us of the whole narrative scope of Jesus’ ministry, it reminds us of the whole breadth of the events of Jesus’ life that in turn create the basic framework for our Church year: from Christmas (born of the virgin Mary) through to Good Friday (crucified under Pontius Pilate), Easter (on the third day he rose again) and Ascension Day (ascended into heaven). So on a very basic level the Creed connects the stories we hear about Jesus each week to the larger Grand Story of Salvation, the Creeds ensure that our understanding of our scripture readings and our understanding of Jesus is rooted in the whole story, and not just seen in isolation.

While the Creeds provide us this connecting point to the greater story of Jesus week-in and week-out, they serve a far greater purpose in describing who Jesus is, and rooting out faith in the Jesus revealed to us in the Scriptures. One of the lines of the Nicene Creed that is so easy to overlook is the line which reads “in accordance with the Scriptures.” While this is dealing specifically with the notion of the Jesus’ resurrection on the third day, it is important to note that the Early Church Fathers who had a hand in developing the statements in the Creed over the first three to four centuries of the Church’s history, were devoted to reflecting the Jesus encountered in the Scriptures – and by Scriptures we mean the Old and New Testaments. The theology of the Creeds seeks to reinforce the notion that all of the Scriptures point to Jesus, that we must use Jesus Christ as the lens through which we read all Scripture, and not just when we are reading stories about Jesus in the Gospels. If following Jesus as Lord is to inform our whole life in discipleship, then it should impact how we read and engage with the Bible too!

The Creeds provide us with a succinct and clear representation of the Scriptural Jesus, without going into the details of his life and ministry. Instead the Creeds very clearly tell us who (and what Jesus is). And here is perhaps the most important reason of all to proclaim and pray the Creeds every week. In the Creeds we affirm the fullness of Jesus’ divinity, and the fullness of his humanity. We affirm that he is Lord, that he is the Only Son of God, begotten of the Father not created, that he and the father are one, and that all things were created through him – all things pertaining to divinity; but we also affirm that he was born of the Virgin Mary and made man, that he suffered death and was buried – all things pertaining to his humanity. This might seem inconsequential to us today, but in fact it is of utmost importance to our lives of faith. On one hand we can overemphasize his divine nature, we can over-emphasize the miraculous and superhuman events and characteristics of Jesus. On the other hand we can over-emphasize Jesus’ humanity, leading us to ignore or completely devalue the scriptural witness to his divinity.

When we make the mistake of thinking of Jesus as only divine, we miss the parts of the Story where Jesus is clearly human – we ignore his birth (however miraculous it was) by his mother Mary, we bypass the temptations in the wilderness, we miss his deep anguish at the death of his friend Lazarus, and ultimately we end up ignoring his real suffering and isolation on the Cross. For our own life of faith and discipleship, it is essential that we affirm and believe the humanity of Jesus – for as one of the Early Church Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus, wrote “that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.” In other words for us to experience the totality of Jesus’ salvation he had to be fully human, his full humanity had to be united to his divinity for us to experience reconciliation with God. Affirming and believing in the humanity of Jesus also reminds us that God is accessible, that God chose to dwell among us, in the midst of our life here on earth. In Jesus we can embrace the transcendent God who is above all things, as truly immanent, as truly here among us. Holding the human incarnation of Jesus, reminds us that our humanity is sacred, reminds us that in Jesus we experience what it means for each of us to be made in the image of God, in Jesus we see the fulfillment of our humanity. In Jesus’ humanity God is able to speak to us in our language, in our lived and shared experience. While Jesus and his human existence also provide us

with a model of love that should shape our life, this is not paramount in why we affirm Jesus' humanity – in other words Jesus might be a great example to live our life by, but he is so so so much more than that, and affirming his humanity is so so so much more than that.

And here is where we come to the error or overemphasizing his humanity. As I have said it is wonderful and vital that we affirm and celebrate the humanity of Jesus, but the Creeds remind us that to stay there, to remain with only an earthly Jesus leaves our understanding of God and of the whole Story incomplete. If we think of Jesus as just as the perfect human we ignore the Scriptural account of his signs and wonders, we ignore his words about being the Son of God and finally we ignore one of the defining acts of the When we overemphasize Jesus' humanity at the expense of his divinity, we often are focusing on the fact that Jesus is a great moral teacher, we are focusing on the fact that his teachings provide us with a life-giving framework that is centred on love of neighbour and enemy alike. If our faith is rooted in this Jesus who is just a man, just a wise philosopher, just an inspiring leader or merely just the best example of humanity then we have very little hope for reconciliation with God, we have very little hope that Jesus' death effected anything. Furthermore, if Jesus isn't the Son of God, and if his death and resurrection don't effect for us a reconciliation with God, then his life and teachings represent an unattainable standard to live up to. If the whole of the Christian story is about emulating the life of Jesus, then we are all doomed, we have no chance. We all know how difficult it is to follow Jesus, and if he is just a man, then our salvation is dependent on how well we follow him, it is dependent on how well our lives are shaped by this paradigm of self-giving love that extends even to our worst enemies – this is not Good News, even the best among us fall into sin, even the most righteous and loving among us do not allow for Jesus' vision of love to shape our thoughts and actions all the time. Our only hope lies in the grace and mercy of God, that is found at the intersection of life and death, that is found at the intersection between the temporal and the everlasting, between our frail human existence and the eternal and everlasting God, in Jesus both fully human and fully God. Jesus' divinity is important because it is only if affirm and believe that Jesus is fully divine, that we can then say we encounter God. We have a relationship with God because in Jesus these two natures dwell – both God and man.

Athanasius, whose name is given to the Creed we used last week, spent much of his vocational life defending the fullness of Jesus' divinity and humanity and on the topic he wrote "he became what we are so that we could become what he is." This is what we affirm in the Creeds when we speak about Jesus, we affirm that in this intersection of Jesus' humanness and his 'Godness', we can experience salvation from sin, we can experience through adoption what it means to share the divine life of God, to experience full and perfect relationship with God. Our passage from First Corinthians speaks of the Cross as the power of God, even though the world consider it foolishness. Bishop Stephen Cottrell in his reflection for the Pilgrim study series puts it this way: "on the Cross, Jesus who is God defeats sin and death. On the cross, Jesus who is man shares the consequences of that sin and dies a sinner's death." It is in this paradoxical pairing of victory and defeat, of life and death where we witness who God is, that we witness depths of love God has for humankind and for all creation.

While the Creeds remind us of the whole of salvation history we must remember why God did this, we must remember why Jesus, Son of God, chose to suffer and die so that we might "become what he is" as Athanasius wrote. When we pray and proclaim what the Creeds have to say about Jesus, remember that it is out of God's love for us that this has happened, that it is because we are loved, that we can experience the life of God in Christ. Our passage from the Gospel of John, reminds us of this. In our passage this morning we heard the beloved and oft used verse from John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." While this is a beautiful verse of scripture and a comfort to many of us here today, I often regret that we do not continue the passage when we remember it for it says, "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." God's plan of salvation in Jesus, was not meant to condemn but to save, that God's love is at the root of salvation history. Every time we say the Creed we need to remember that at the root of it all we are loved, we as humankind are loved so deeply by God our Lord and Creator that he would send his Son to dwell among us, to suffer among us, to die among us – so that we might dwell with him, so that we might rejoice with him, so that we might taste everlasting life with him. This is why I love the Creeds, this is why we say the Creeds every week, this is why we proclaim the fullness of Jesus' humanity and divinity, so that we might be reminded every time we say it of the hope we have as Christians, so that we might be reminded of how beloved we are in the eyes of God, and so that we might cling to Jesus, cling to God so our lives and the world around us might be transformed.

Let us pray.