

**Readings:** Acts 7:55-60, I Peter 2:2-10, John 14:6-11**Hymns:** 331, 349, 350

✠ In the name of Jesus ✠

“Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.””

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is: ‘The Nicene Creed: Confessing Christ before men’.

It has often been said, “those who are ignorant of history are destined to repeat it.” History, I think, proves this statement to be true, especially within the church. Having entered the third millennium of our struggle against the forces of darkness, it is evident that there really aren’t any new heresies out there to combat. Those that seem new are really just rehashed, reshaped and regurgitated forms of something old.

Some, however, would question about whether it is an ignorance of history or an apathy toward it that is the real problem. Jimmy Buffett, that great philosopher and contemporary icon, put that whole argument to rest though. When asked if the problem we face is one of ignorance or apathy, he responded, “I don’t know and I don’t care.”

Whether we are ignorant of our history or apathetic toward it, the fact is, it too often remains shrouded in darkness. Our collective minds quickly forget old struggles, mainly when we ourselves didn’t have to fight them.

But like on Remembrance Day, each year we remember in part those who fought for our freedoms, each time we confess the Nicene Creed we can also remember those bishops who came together to stand firm against the devil’s attack to destroy the church.

Do you realize, if it were not for some brave and faithful bishops, who lived in the 4th century, the church might well have gotten her confession of Jesus wrong!? Getting Jesus wrong in turn also gets God wrong. Getting God wrong leads to a wrong understanding of salvation, and how we are saved. In the end the church of Christ crumbles. Getting Jesus wrong isn’t a minor detail.

In fact, the Lutheran theologian and teacher, Francis Pieper, wrote the second volume of his three volume series on Christian Dogmatics first, to ensure the continued correct understanding and teaching of who Christ is and what Christ has done. He wrote it first just in case he died before the completion of the series, at least that volume would be complete. In the beginning of the second volume Pieper writes: ‘Whoever denies that Christ in His theanthropic, God in the flesh, Person and His theanthropic work of redemption is the object of saving faith cancels the Christian doctrine of justification and does away with all of Christianity. It is obvious that the doctrine of Christ must be kept absolutely pure.’ (*Pieper, vol 2, p.55*) He then continues over the next 507 page to define in greater detail what the bishops in Nicaea were able to concisely say in 18 lines of the Creed.

The bishops also knew the tremendous importance of getting Jesus right. Justo Gonzalez, in his *Story of Christianity*, writes, “It was the year 325 when the bishops gathered in Nicene, a city in Asia Minor..., for what later would be known as the First Ecumenical— that is, the first universal— Council. The exact number of bishops present is not known...but there were approximately three hundred, mostly from the Greek-speaking East, but also some from the West. In order to understand that event as those present saw it, it is necessary to remember that several of those attending the great assembly had recently been imprisoned, tortured, or exiled, and that some bore on their bodies the physical marks of their faithfulness. And now, a few years after such trials, these very bishops were invited to gather at Nicaea, and the emperor covered their expenses. Many of those present knew of each other by hearsay or through correspondence. But now, for the first time in the history of Christianity, they had before their eyes physical evidence of the universality of the church.”

The council at Nicaea was charged with dealing with several issues that were troubling the church, but none was more important than the pressing need to deal with what was called the Arian controversy. They knew they needed to answer the question: Who exactly is Jesus? Was Jesus truly God, or was He a creation of God? Did Jesus always exist, or only exist for a limited amount of time? Was Jesus of the same substance as the Father, or was Jesus something less than the Father? Is Jesus the Saviour of the whole world, or simply an example to follow? So Who is Jesus?

These same questions continue today. The saying, “there is nothing new under the sun”, continues to hold true for Christianity and the heresies which keep re-inventing themselves.

So, “Who exactly is Jesus Christ?”, or as Jesus says “**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**” and, “**Who do you say that I am?**”(Matthew 16:14-15). On the answer to this question rests the basis and foundation of our entire faith and trust in Christ and the Triune God: the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in our salvation.

So, ‘Who is this Jesus?’ An important second question is ‘What does God reveal about His Son, our Lord Christ Jesus in the clear words of Holy Scripture?’ To begin, the bishops at Nicaea got it right. They didn’t hypothesize or try to look to themselves for the answer. They went to God’s Word. They knew the importance of clearly expressing God’s Word rather than their own thoughts. For there is no other reliable source for knowing God and His Son, than through God’s revealed Word.

Open your hymnals to the last page and walk with me as we look at what we are confessing in the second article of the Nicene Creed. Follow with me what the second article has to say.

When the bishops gathered in Nicaea they spent a month discussing matters of the church and formulating this creed. What follows is what Holy Scripture has to say about Christ and what the bishops brought together in the creed, now called the Nicene Creed.

*I believe* **“in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,”** this is important because it reaffirms there is only one God, not many gods; **“begotten of His Father before all worlds,”** as John 1:1 says **“In the beginning was the Word”**; **“God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,”** not of a different substance or a lesser substance, as Arius claimed, rather they are of the exact same substance; **“by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man;”** God in the flesh came for you, me, and all people. He didn’t do it in some lofty, high flouting place, He came down and was born in a stable, from a young virgin. Here is where God meets His people first in the flesh. He is in the stable, just as a shepherd sits with his sheep, that is where Christ came for you and me. And what did this man, God in the flesh do for us and our salvation? He **“was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures”**; He is the Good News. Here is why we have hope. This is the celebration of Easter tying in with Christmas. Christ came; He died for us. He suffered in our place, for our sins, for our salvation. He also rose, He **“ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.”**(*Nicene Creed*) Jesus’ first Advent, how He returns, and how He will come again is all here.

Here is God in the flesh come down for you, made man for you, carried your sins, suffered and died in your place so through His death and resurrection He could also raise you to eternal life. In Christ is God, not some sub-god or something else, but the God almighty, the One true God who love you that much.

But our confession is not just for ourselves. As Peter says in our Epistle reading: **“you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ...<sup>9</sup> But you are a**

**chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”(1 Peter 2:5, 9-10)**

Through baptism God called you out of the darkness of this world, made you his very own, marked you with His name, and also redeemed your mouth and lips to be able to share this fantastic news of the Saviour of the whole world. The Good News that God took on our flesh to save all people, and in Him we do have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. The purpose of the Nicene Creed is not just to confess, but also to profess and proclaim as well, to give us the words to say, and to stay strong in our faith and trust in God, to repel any false teaching, and to proclaim the salvation of the world to the world.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel **“I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”** There is no need to fall back into error. Here there is Truth, here we come, here we are saved, because here is Christ for you, for all, and for our salvation. Now in this Christ, let us rejoice and share His good news of salvation and eternal life.

✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠

\* This sermon belongs to Christ and His Church because it is taken from His Word. I would like to thank Rev. Alan Taylor, from St. John Lutheran Church, Galveston, Texas, for the idea for this sermon series. While some of the original text remains, most has been changed, including the overall focus of the sermon. Please feel free to copy or use this sermon accordingly. I expect people to copy my sermons otherwise I would not post them. I only ask that you quote accurately if you attribute anything to me. Should you decide to contact me, I would be very interested in knowing where you are. Please include the name of your city, province or state, and country when contacting me.