

Creed (4)- I Believe in the Church

(John 13:31-34)

I. Introduction

- A. One the trends you see in new church plants is what we might call a “*portable church*”
1. That’s where the church meets in a rented hall (school, theater or community center)
 - a. The equipment needed to have church is stored in portable unit (*church-in-a-can*)
 - 1) The only property the church owns is large trailer to store and hauls equipment
 - 2) So Sunday worship is portable; the rest of church life is small groups in homes
 - b. Novelty companies take this concept one step further— *the inflatable church*
 - 1) Used by wedding planners for those who want church & destination wedding
 - 2) Might come in handy for Pentecostal-type who want to bounce off the walls
 2. Would “*church-in-can*” assembled from trailer feel like church? *It would get old*
 - a. Former member came to us from a church that met in the lobby of movie theater
 - b. Pulpit was in front of “*Coming Attractions*” poster (*Rambo over preacher’s shoulder*)
- B. Are we so used to church one way, other ways feel wrong? Let me suggest different ways:
1. What if Sunday sermon were more like a class where I asked questions? (*I just did!*)
 - a. Besides inconvenience of having to stay awake the whole time, would it be wrong?
 - b. What if we served communion around a table after a meal? (*like in the first century*)
 - c. What if women served communion as well as the men? (*like they do every other meal*)
 - d. What if had sung some good old Gregorian chants? (*were good enough for 500 years*)
 - e. What if instead of planning songs we took suggestions (more in line with **1 Cor 14:36**)
 - f. What if we had one service... it was at night... and we weren’t sure of start time?
 2. Some of you are thinking, “*Here we go again! Here comes some goofy new thing!*”
 - a. Actually, these are old things; this is more like the first century church did church!
 - b. We tend to equate how we currently do church with how church must be done!
 3. I have an old sermon, “*7 Signs of True Church.*” (*Was it 10 signs, or 40 or 144,000?*)
 - a. All of those were external signs— name, organization, worship, doctrine, etc.
 - b. But in the Bible, the characteristics stressed about the church are relational
 - 1) Church is not really an external thing—which is what we usually have in mind
 - 2) The church in the NT is the called out and called together people of God
 - c. We continue with Creed: What Christians Believe; today we look at the CHURCH
“*I believe in the holy catholic [universal] Church, the communion [fellowship] of saints*”

II. We Tend to Focus on Church Externals—Two Points

- A. **First**, the church is not a building. I'm actually an international expert on this point!
1. In our first trip to Ukraine, my topic was “the church” and this a point I was to stress
 - a. The Russian word for “*church*” is “*cathedral*.” I evidently stressed it pretty well.
 - b. During question time, translator answered without waiting, “*I told them church...*”
 2. We know the church is not a building, right? *But then language betrays us.*
 - a. We say things “*I'll meet at the church*” or “*Let's have the meeting at the church*”
 - b. Can we even imagine the Christian faith without this building we call “the church”
 - 1) Much of budget goes to it; much of our “*church work*” revolves around it
 - 2) We have Special rules that limit how the building can be used and can't be
 3. The usual word for “*house*” or “*building*” in the NT is the Greek word “*oikos*”
 - a. It used of king's palaces (**Matt 11:8**). It is also used of the Temple (**Matt 12:4**)
 - b. It's used of private homes (**Luke 7:36**). It is also used of families (**Luke 1:69**)
 - c. Hebrews uses this same word to refer to the real “*church house*” (**Heb 3:5-6**)
 4. Church isn't a place or what we do in this place— **church is who we are**
- B. **Second**, the church is not an institutional. We do sometimes look at it that way.
1. We talk about the “*institution of marriage*.” *Who wants to live in institution?*
 - a. The language “*institutional*” even sounds archaic; it brings to mind *impersonal*.
 - 1) Do you choose “*institutional colors?*” Or buy “*institutional furniture?*”
 - 2) Camp gets a great deal on institutional mattresses (*after they're done*)
 - b. What about an “*institutional organization?*” What that bring to mind... rules.
 2. I once took a grad class in “Church Organization,” though you would never know it
 - a. Focus of the class was writing a “*Church Manual*” to anticipate issues with policy
 - 1) There is something to be said here—fire evacuation plan, active shooter plan
 - 2) Ideal manual would cover every doctrinal/procedural question in advance
 - b. Institutions thrive off rules— like when to meet, what you can do where and when.
 - c. What often gets overlooked is PEOPLE, very thing church is to be and is be about
 3. It's why Jesus constantly criticized the Pharisees— they saw rules & missed people
 - a. Their traditions became burdens that simply wore people down (**Matt 23:3-4**)
 - b. The rules and policies discouraged people from seeking God (**Matt 23:13**)
 - c. They succeeded in making converts that looked like them, not God (**Matt 23:15**)

III. What the Bible Focus On: Love

- A. There's a glaring omission in Apostles Creed and those following (Nicene & Athanasian)
1. Creed began as short, easy to memorize & teach statement of what Christians believe
 - a. It became an answer to attacks by heretics and this was added to—*wasn't so short*
 - b. The problem with all version of creed isn't what they said but what it didn't say
 2. In *Love First*, Don McLaughlin says the one doctrine skipped by all the creeds is love
 - a. It's not in *Apostles Creed*, it not in Nicene Creed, it not in the Athanasian Creed
 - 1) McLaughlin suggests something was left out of the creed at the very beginning
 - 2) Christians could thus be “orthodox” without giving this any consideration

Is something missing from the creed—something crucial—that speaks to our history of hate, racism, bigotry and disunity... In every century from the first to the twenty-first, some who quote the creed practice audacious evil and still believe they are right with God. We have politicians and preachers who claim the creed in one breath and then pollute the conscience of our national community in the next. I believe the creed has been leveraged in this unholy history.
 - b. Doctrine the creeds leave out is the greatest commandment— our prime directive
 - c. When Jesus is asked for the greatest command, he didn't pause (**Matt 22:37-40**)
 - 1) Love isn't in the creed! You can recite the creed with a scowl on your face
 - 2) Why? By time creeds came along, being right was more important than love!
- B. **Question:** Are we really going to believe Jesus or are we not? (**Reading: John 13:31-34**)
1. Jesus is preparing apostles here for coming crucifixion; Judas just left the building
 - a. He tells them two things that are one thing—He will be glorified and so will God
 - b. That means the time is short. “*I will be with you only a little longer*” (**John 13:33**)
 - 1) He must have a jillion things he'd like to tell them, but the time is getting short
 - 2) So you know the things that he does say are going to be very important indeed
 2. He gives them is a new command, “*Love one another.*” How is that new command?
 - a. Jesus had gotten the command “love your neighbor as yourself” from **Leviticus 19**
 - b. This command that he gives his disciples to love one is new in two different ways
 - 1) **DEGREE:** We are to love one another as he has loved us (**1 John 3:16**)
 - 2) **PURPOSE:** By this everyone will know you are my disciples (**Acts 2:45,47**)
 3. We mentioned earlier “*marks of true church.*” There's no true church without love.
 - a. McLaughlin: Elder at small church spitting mad at clapping at a baptism (imagine)
 - 1) Said to another elder, “*We'll just put a stop that that [expletive] clapping!*”
 - 2) Clapping was against his creed— cussing wasn't! *Neither was being unloving*
 - b. There is no true church without love; we show we're disciples by loving others

IV. Conclusion

- A. We began couple of lessons in series by saying Apostles creed together (weird for many)
1. We want to do that again as we close, but with a addendum—actually more a preface
 - a. Don McLaughlin wonders of preface could have change the course of history
 - b. Believers who confessed the creed thought they were loyal and faithful to God
 - 1) Sometimes (oftentimes) they were free to act very unloving toward others
 - 2) Sometimes they acted unloving to those who were faithful to the same creed
 - 3) *30 Years War* was fought between those reciting same creed (8 million died)
 2. What is in A.D. 150 or so when the Apostles creed started to be used it had a preface
 - a. No changes in what we've been saying, just a commitment to love (McLaughlin)

I believe that God is love.
I believe that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that the world may be saved through him.
I believe that God loved me when I was a powerless, ungodly sinner and enemy.
I believe that the first and greatest command is to love God with all that I am.
I believe that with the first and greatest command, I am to love my neighbor as myself.
I believe that I must love my enemies, the ungrateful, and the wicked.
I believe that if I claim to love God but do not love others, I am a liar.
I believe that when I see my brothers and sisters in need, I must help them with my material possessions.
 - b. Then after a commitment to our prime directive, then we're ready for—

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.
 - c. Would that preface to the Apostles Creed really have changed church history?
- B. I don't know. I do know is that this is what we are to believe and how we are to live
1. I believe in the church—but that doesn't mean a building or an institution
 - a. It means that God put me in relationship—to a body here and believers everywhere
 - b. It means that I am to treat my fellow believers as, well, as brothers and sisters
 - c. And that the way we treat one another reflects on our relationships to Jesus Christ
 2. We have to be right before God in following his truth and we must be loving to others
 - a. God never gives us a pass on being loving to others so that we can be right
 - b. Because when we are loving, even to our enemies—that is being right!