

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, The Apostles' Creed
Lenten Reflection, Wednesday, March 3, 2010
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace.....

It is a pleasure to be with you once again this evening, the second week of Lent, to reflect on the teachings of the Christian faith, as found in my *Small Catechism*. I would like to begin my reflection tonight with a common saying (which would also be familiar to us in Germany), which is "*If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's a duck!*" In other words, the way to positively identify an animal by its species, is to simply observe what it looks like and what it does, its sounds and its mannerisms as well as its shape and colors. You and I can tell the different types of birds apart by their colors, their feathers, their beaks, and their songs, as well as by their diet and their behaviors. You can tell the different kinds of animals apart as well by what they look like and how they act. For instance, it is easy to tell a giraffe from a gerbil, or a lion from a mouse.

But how do you tell human beings apart? You may be able to distinguish human beings from each other by the color of their hair or their skin, the type of clothing that they wear, and by what they eat. But they are still all human beings, the same species, of the same human family. Who are they *inside*? The best way to tell humans apart is *by what we believe*, which has so much to do with how we live and act. For example, how can you tell that somebody is a Christian, as distinguished from a Muslim, a Jew, a Hindu or an agnostic. It is by what we believe! It matters very much what you and I believe as Christian people, because what we believe has everything to do with what we value, what we do, and how we live as people of God. How do you tell somebody is a Lutheran? Well, it goes far beyond green jello! Lutheran Christians have a definite perspective on what we believe about God, and how we should then live as children of God.

Tonight's focus from the Lutheran Catechism is the Apostles' Creed, the faith of Jesus' disciples which has been passed down over 2000 years through the scriptures and the Church to us. The word "creed" comes for the Latin word *credo*, which means, literally, "I believe." Some of the first statements of faith in the gospels were simple, such as the words "Jesus is Lord." Another early statement of belief was read tonight from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, when he said: "*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures..*"

You and I have made our statement of faith tonight in a creed that was developed over several hundred years by the Church, based on the witness of the

apostles in the holy scriptures, about the mighty acts of God accomplished through His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. For the purpose of teaching this Creed to our children in the Church, I have divided this creed into three articles, or statements, of faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (which we call “The Holy Trinity”). I also included in my *Small Catechism* my own explanations of these articles of the Creed, just as I taught them to my own children, so that all Christians can use them in the teaching and learning of the faith. Learning this Creed marks us as Lutherans. For example, the First Article of the Creed says: “*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth*” What does this mean for us? As I said to my own children:

“I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in every danger and guards me from every evil. All this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him.”

This is what we believe about God the Father: that God has made us, guides and protects us like a loving parent. This should fill us all with love, respect, and thanks for what our heavenly Father has done for us! So we respond with those words that all Lutherans have committed to memory: *this is most certainly true!*

Now, for the Second Article: “*I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.*” What does this mean? This is what Lutherans teach and believe:

I believe that Jesus Christ – true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary – is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil – not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true!”

And finally, the Third Article: “*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*” What does this mean? What do Lutherans believe about the Holy Spirit?

“I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church day after day he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead and give me and all

believers in Christ eternal life.” And let the whole church say, This is most certainly true!

This is what it truly means to be a Lutheran: to believe these things and teach them to our children! Now do you know how to distinguish yourselves by what you believe, and how you live? It is simply to believe and trust in the words that God has made me, that Jesus loves me and has died for me, forgives me all my sins and promises to give me eternal life. That the Holy Spirit has given you and me the gift of faith and empowers the whole Church to stay united in this faith. Then everything we say and do comes out of thanksgiving for what God has done.

You know, it may be hard to tell a Lutheran by how we walk and by how we talk, by what we wear and how we look – for we come from all parts of the world. There are Lutherans on every continent of this earth! We are not just from Germany anymore, not even just from Scandinavia - we are also in North and South America, Africa and Asia – even down under in Australia! A Lutheran doesn't walk like a duck or talk like a duck! But a Lutheran believes that though we are all sinners and saints, we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to preach this good news once more, in the name of Jesus my Lord and my Savior. Thanks be to God! Amen.