

Unlocking Scripture: The Apostles' Creed, Pt. 2
I Believe in God the Father
Deuteronomy 1: 30-31, Isaiah 64:8; Matthew 7: 9-11; John 20:17

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Last week, we began considering the compact summary of our belief called The Apostles' Creed. We noted how bold it is to begin a statement with "I believe..." It means we are committing ourselves to a particular view of reality. We are going all-in with a unique understanding of who God is. We saw how the Creed is actually a report of how this unique God has acted in the world. The Creed gives the borders to the story of the Triune God's redeeming works. It provides the frame so we can keep the story straight. It's super-concentrated story content. A little dab unleashes life-transformative power.

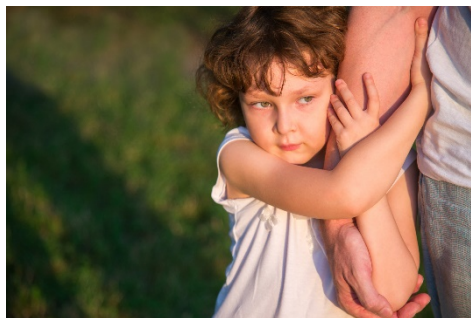
Today, we're taking up what it means to say, "I believe in God the Father." Calling God our Father is a unique privilege of Christian faith. It ushers us into intimacy with the Creator of the universe.

So, consider how these images strike you. What gets stirred when you see



them?

What do you feel as this father tosses his child high in the air with strong arms waiting to catch him safely? Fear? No. Joy? Surely. Yearning? Definitely.



How about this picture:

What does Dad's arm mean to this little girl? Does she trust? Will that strong right arm keep her safe?

Or how about this one:



What does it mean to be a father?

On the edge of the Promised Land, Moses prepared the people for all that lay ahead by reminding them of how the LORD had acted for them in the past. Moses said, “The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place” (Deut.1: 30-31). The LORD carried his people through the years of slavery in Egypt, through the decades in the wilderness and into the land that awaited them. He brought them out of danger into safety.

The spiritual daring of our creed goes far beyond simple acknowledgement of a Supreme Being. Each time we say the Creed, we plunge into a stunning assertion, “I believe in God the Father Almighty.” We are not engaging a powerful but remote Deity. In the Creed, we are leaping towards the arms of the one who invites us to call him Abba, Father. This is an almost scandalous intimacy. That the Almighty God should be addressed as Father!

Calling out to God our Father awakens the father-yearning that is in all of us. Whether we had absent fathers or engaged dads, passive fathers or overly aggressive ones, we know even in our wounds the love for which we long. This relationship has rarely been depicted on screen more powerfully than in the 2013 movie *About Time*. The magic in the film invites us to allow for a bit of time-travel. We pick up the scene where the father, played by Bill Nighy, and the son, played by Domhnall Gleeson, have played their last game of ping pong. The father's cancer will soon take him and there will be no more postponing of the inevitable parting. But they have time to select one brief hour to relive together. A boyhood walk on the beach in Cornwall.



If you've followed the whole story, you can't watch this scene without a lump in your throat, or, more likely, some fat tears and big sobs. The yearning for intimacy with our fathers runs deep. It doesn't matter if you had no father, a great father or a horrible one. In our bones is this longing for the affirmation and protection, the blessing and the closeness, the strength and the safety of our fathers.

In Psalm 103, David takes us straight to the heart of our heavenly Father: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him." He explains what that compassion looks like. God our Father tenderly regards our frailty, "He knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust." His mercies cannot be measured, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him." Our heavenly Father is quick to forgive utterly, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." The Fatherhood of God is revealed by how he acts towards his children. In tender regard. In heartfelt compassion. In forgiving mercy. He longs to be in relationship to us.

Jesus spoke constantly of his Father in heaven. And he reminded his disciples that his Father is their Father.

- Jesus urged his disciples to love their enemies as well as their friends because then they would be like their heavenly Father, who "makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Mt. 5: 45). The Father pours forth his gifts on the world. He loves everyone and desires to bless us.
- Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father *knows that you need them all*. (Mt. 6: 31-2). Your heavenly Father knows what you need. His eye is upon you. He wants you to trust him so that you may be free from worry. He will provision you.

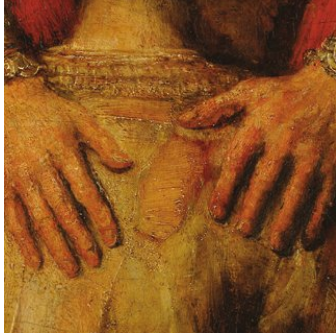
- Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom! (Luke 12: 32). Our Father *wants* to give us himself. He does not begrudge our need for him. He made us to depend on him so that he can fulfill our deepest longings with his love.
- Jesus told them, “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish will give him a serpent, or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? So *how much more* will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Lk. 11: 11-3). Anything we see that is good in our earthly fathers is magnified by the phrase *How much more?* Our Father overflows with gifts for us. Most precious of all, he gives us his own Spirit to dwell inside us and assure of his love.
- Speaking of us, his sheep, Jesus said, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (Jn. 10: 29). He will not let us go, not ever.

Of course, nowhere is God revealed more poignantly as our Father than in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. After the boy had spent his inheritance in wild living in a far country, he ended up slopping the pig sty during a severe economic downturn. Humbled at last, he determined to go back to his father and ask just to be made a servant. But while the boy was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was moved with yearning love in his inmost being. He ran and embraced the son and kissed him. Perhaps the most famous depiction of this scene was painted by Rembrandt:



The young man presses into his father. His head is shaved, one foot is bare, his clothes are filthy rags. He releases his defiance in tears of immense relief. The Father clasps him close. His gentle, strong hands pull the boy towards him. There is no recrimination. Only acceptance. “This my son was dead but is alive again. He was lost and is found.” This is good news beyond hope for us. If we have breath, we can still go home to our heavenly Father. He waits for us. He yearns for us. He just wants us with him.

The cure for those who carry father wounds is discovering the love of our heavenly Father. For those who have been smacked around with words or fists, look closely at the hands of the father in Rembrandt's picture.



They are gentle. Open. Strong enough to gather us in. Restrained enough not to hurt us.

For those who could not find our fathers, look at the son's head against his



father's chest. He feels the warmth of his father's body. He smells his clothes. He is gathered by a father whose full regard is for his son. The father has all the time in the world for him. This is all he wants. For those who never knew their fathers or lost them too soon, here is news. Your heavenly Father is eternal. He is God the Father Almighty. He does not grow weary. He does not fade away. No one is greater than our Father. We cannot be snatched away from him. And he will always, always be there.

How can such good news be true? How can we know God as our Father in this way? Let's close out with considering our *adoption* into Christ. In one stunning verse from the apostle Paul. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave [to sin, to being lost, to despair] but a son [of your Father]. And if a son, an heir through God" (Gal, 4: 4-7).

How do lost, disinherited, illegitimate, prodigals get taken into the family of the heavenly Father? When we were as lost as lost could be, the Father sent forth his Son. He sent his Son to be born of a woman, flesh and blood like we are. He sent his Son to live under the crushing weight of expectations. To keep the Law of God which no one had ever or could ever do. Jesus lived out his Sonship from within our skin. He lived out being the beloved human Son our Father had longed for but never had. He redeemed us from condemnation and futility. He got us out of the mess we were in and gave us instead something of infinite value: *adoption into his life with his Father.*

We can get in on Jesus' Sonship. Men, women, boys, girls can be included in Jesus' Sonship to his Father. Jesus himself said it on Easter morning when he spoke to Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (Jn. 20:17). We now participate in the relationship that Jesus has had with his Father from all eternity. We turn to him in faith. We enter his family. He sends his Spirit into our hearts to assure us that he has adopted us. We are not only legally adopted by Christ's death and resurrection for us. We are given the DNA of our family. We share the Spirit of the Father and the Son. His Spirit reaches through us up to our Father in heaven. He prompts us to pray. He sends us homeward should we stray. He moves in worship. He trains us how to live as part of God's family and in pursuit of God's mission.

Your heavenly Father longs for you to turn to him. If you're a prodigal, start for home. If you feel distant, be a little child again. Hold up your arms to him. Say to him like a child to her father, "Pick me up!" Walk towards him in prayer with your arms up, trusting that he will catch you. He will clasp you. He will take you to himself through Jesus Christ. For all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved. Your heavenly Father loves you. He just wants you home. He just wants you to turn to him, for the first time or the millionth time. Run to him like grandson Caleb goes to his father: arms up, in eager expectation that he will be embraced and received in love.