

By what Creed shall we live?

John 14:1-14

The word Creed comes from the Latin word “Credo” and it means “Believe”. I have entitled today’s sermon “By what Creed shall we live?” because every person either knowingly or unknowingly lives according to a creed. In John 14, Jesus invites us to live by the Creed he gave to his apostles just hours before his crucifixion.

But before we consider the creed found in John 14, I want to say something about two creeds that I would suggest shape the lives of many Canadians today. According to the 2001 census there are a growing number of Canadians, approximately 23%, as compared to 19.4% in the 1991 census, who would express the point of view represented by Ken Ryan. With Ken, they would say they have no religion. While he was brought up Anglican, Ken always had a fascination with mythology and other religions. After taking an anthropology course he said he lost his faith.

To quote him: “I don't see any reason to believe in religion. The problem is I don't like it. I'd prefer to have religion, but I can't lie. I think faith is a great comfort to people and I think it would be really nice to have it ... but either you do or you don't. And I don't.”

It’s hard to know, without talking to Ken, why he believes he cannot have faith. It might be because Ken believes one of two things or a combination of the two. Ken’s creed may be:

1. Believe in yourself

We live in a society that encourages us to think of the self as the centre. Fulfillment is attained when we can shed ourselves of the need to be accountable to God or any group or authority other than myself. Because religious practice calls me beyond self-fulfillment to become part of a larger community, many people find this threatening and too demanding. Part of the attitude is “no one else is going to tell me how to think and live”. Organized religion is perceived as authoritarian and restrictive and hinders a person from attaining self-fulfillment.

The second creed declares:

2. All religions are trying to understand and explain some universal experience

that we characterize as religious.

Those of us who live at the beginning of the 21st century are heirs to a way of thinking about religions which assumes that there is some universal experience that can be characterized as “religious.” The plurality of religions, this mindset assumes, are the varied expression of a universal human experience. We shouldn’t be too dismayed by the wide array of religious expressions in our society, according to this view, for the basic experience behind them transcends their particular expressions.

When we understand that we live in a country where the dominant creeds proclaim:

i) Believe in yourself

and

ii) All religions are trying to understand and explain some universal experience that we characterize as religious,

and we then listen to Jesus’ words in John 14, we hear him presenting us with a very different creed. Instead of saying “believe in yourself” he says “Believe in God, believe also in me” Instead of saying all religions are trying to understand and explain some universal experience that we characterize as religious, Jesus says: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

As we think of the creed Jesus teaches in John 14 there are particulars that are not universal religious ideas but specific to Christianity. It is the distinctiveness of Jesus’ teaching that leads his followers to say that not all religions are trying to understand and explain some universal experience that we characterize as religious.

At its very core is the distinctive and particular teaching of the Gospels, which Christians maintain, has been passed down to us from Jesus. It is the responsibility of Jesus’ body in the world, the church, to ensure that we do not blur what he has so clearly taught. We are to be that community of people inviting others to join us and live out, by the Holy Spirit’s guidance, what Jesus’ taught. And while there will always be numerous people who will reject Jesus’ teaching, there will be others who on better understanding Him and seeing faith being lived out by a community of believing Christians will choose to become part of such a fellowship.

So what does Jesus teach about the Christian Creed in these verses from John 14. There are three things I want to highlight. Jesus teaches:

1. Jesus and the Father are one
2. We come to the Father through Jesus
3. As we live by this creed our lives come to reflect the life Jesus lived when he was in the world and we will want others to join us in living their lives according to this creed.

1. Jesus and the Father are one:

At verse 1 Jesus says: "Believe in God, believe also in me." At verse seven he goes on to say: "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 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; but the Father who dwells in me does his works."

Here is a passage that is uniquely Christian. No other religion records its founder saying words like these. At the heart of Jesus' teaching, particularly in John's Gospel, is this bold declaration, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

There is much about God that we do not understand. There are as Deuteronomy 29:29 states "things about God that are hidden from us. But the things that have been revealed are our business It's up to us and our children to attend to all the terms of this revelation."

As Christians we understand that God has presented this revelation to us in the 66 books of the Bible. As a Christian preacher and as a Christian congregation our responsibility is to attend to this revelation in such a way that we see how the Bible in its entirety and then in its various components affirms what Jesus says here. Therefore as Christian interpreters of the Old Testament we need to see it in light of who the New Testament says Jesus is. It is my responsibility as your priest to help you

understand and apply what is found in this revelation.

Although the words “Believe in God, believe also in me” is but one sentence, it requires the whole of the Bible to understand it and apply it.

Not only does Jesus teach that he and the father are one he then goes on to say:

2. We come to the Father through Jesus:

At verse 6b Jesus says: “No one comes to the Father except through me.”

It is through Jesus that we have access to the Father because it is in Jesus Christ that two aspects of God's character evident throughout the Old Testament are fully displayed. They are his justice and mercy.

On the cross God exercises justice as he deals with Sin with a capital S. Jesus taught that Sin, with a capital “S” is our being away from God. This teaching is captured in story form in the Parable of the Prodigal or Wayward Son. I would like to suggest that this waywardness, Sin with a capital “S”, is like a virus, say the flu. When we have the flu virus there are certain symptoms associated with it. Running nose, fever, headache, exhaustion, and so on. So too the virus we call Sin has certain symptoms which we would describe as sins in the plural with a lower case s. The bible teaches us that Sin, the Virus is our waywardness from God. And when we live away from God our lives reflect this virus by the sins we commit. In the passage from 1 Peter some of those lower case sins are referred to in verse 1 “Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.”

On the Cross, God in Christ confronts Sin and judges it for what it is.

God is so to speak the doctor and gives us both the diagnosis and prognosis. He declares from the Cross, humanity is sick. This is the diagnosis. Unless they allow me to treat the Virus of Sin people will die, spiritually, emotionally, relationally and even physically. This is the prognosis.

We are sick and in need of healing.

The antibiotic is mercy.

On the Cross God also exercises mercy as he confronts human suffering and guilt by declaring that we can turn to God in Christ and be forgiven so that not only will the Virus we call Sin be treated but so will Sin's symptoms. The mercy of God is like the antibiotic. When we receive for ourselves the mercy Jesus offers than we can understand that Jesus alone is the one who can bring us to the Father. Because it is only on the cross where judgement and mercy find their full expression and the Virus called Sin fully treated.

To summarize then the first two aspects of the creed.

1. Jesus and the Father are one
2. We come to the Father through Jesus

And thirdly:

3: As we live by this creed our lives come to reflect the life Jesus lived when he was in the world. We will want others to join us in living their lives according to this creed.

John quotes Jesus saying at verse 6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” This is a sentence that is so full of meaning that I cannot do proper justice to it now. Suffice it to say for today that Jesus is telling his disciples “study my life, remember the way I lived, for I am the way. Remember what I taught you, for I am the truth. Remember that regardless of what you will face in this world in the way of suffering, and trouble, I am the life because I have defeated death by the Resurrection.”

As people come to realize that Jesus is the only one who was never wayward in his relationship to the Father, (Remember he says in this passage more than once, “I and the Father are one”) and so lived a life free of the symptoms of the Sin virus; we too can learn from him. At verse 12 he says “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

What a wonderful promise this is for those who follow Jesus. Jesus says that when we believe in him, and are learning as a congregation to walk closely with Him our life

will not be primarily symptomatic of Sin's influence. Rather we will be living our life shaped by our belief in the Father and his son Jesus Christ our Lord. It is in communities where people understand that Jesus and the Father are one and Jesus brings us to the Father that we will also be inspired by Jesus example because we will see in him the one who is the way, the truth and the life. This inspiration will be Holy Spirit directed, so that we will live more fully Jesus did when he was in the world and will want to share this with others.

There is a need for us to live by Jesus' creed because as Ken Ryan admitted his creed is inadequate. Remember what he said. "I'd prefer to have religion, but I can't lie. I think faith is a great comfort to people and I think it would be really nice to have it." By what creed shall we live?

The one Jesus gives us is the only one we as Christians are to live by, Not only because it has substance and distinctiveness that is worth living, and if need be dying for, as countless Christians have affirmed by their shed blood. But it is also this creed alone that will allow our lives to be a witness to others, so that they too may hopefully ask "By what creed shall I live?" In coming to answer that question they may conclude "by the one Jesus gives to us in John 14."