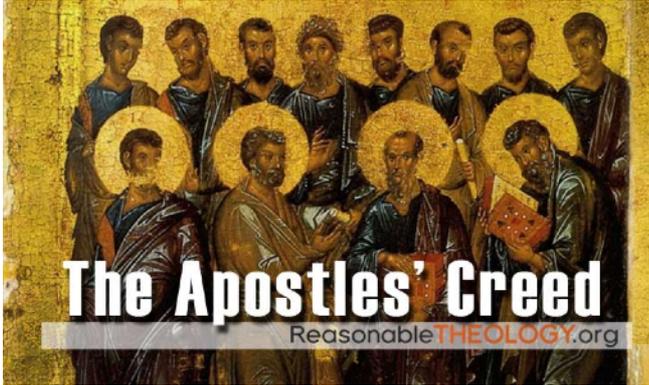

Creed Introduction

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 11 January 2026

Revelation 3:14-20 • Mark 9:14-21



Let's pray, Lord Jesus, open our minds and heart to the truth of the Gospel. May our faith be strengthened and our confidence be emboldened, that we might better live our lives to the glory of God, amen.

In a couple weeks when I'm covering All Saints for a period of weeks in a row I'm going to take the opportunity

to start working through the Creed. We won't get through the whole thing in the few weeks we have but we can make a start.

For any unfamiliar with Creeds we most usually say one in the context of a more formal Anglican service. A Creed is simply a distilled summary of the central and non negotiable tenants of our faith. Today is something of an introduction before we start proper in a couple weeks.

Let's begin to explore the value of unpacking a Creed by asking a question. Why do we sometimes struggle in our life of faith?

There can of course be many reasons. I'll mention three.

- Firstly, the cost of it all. Living like Jesus confronts us on every level.
- Secondly, the scope of it all. There is so much to grasp and understand. That's where a Creed can help us. A creed will distil and articulate our faith. It will help us better understand the one who we are called to believe in.
- Thirdly, and this very often proves to be one of the greatest stumbling blocks for many people; way we often equate faith with feelings.

In the 80's, when I came back into church life and found myself as a youth Coordinator at Sumner Anglican when Derek Eaton was drawing a crowd with his passionate and gospel centred preaching, one of the principals that was

emphasised, especially when dealing with enthusiastic and lively teenagers, was the importance of putting faith or facts above, or before, feelings.

There was a little diagram that was used to help explain this. A train where the carriages were marked feelings and the engine facts.

The point being, don't be led by your feelings. Feelings are subjective, unreliable, changeable. We all know that. We can feel love for a person one minute, and the next be frustrated and annoyed with them.

The feelings might be justified. But on the other hand they might be remarkably unreliable. Our feelings might have more to do with a poor night's sleep than the actions of the person who is trying our patience.

Facts on the other hand are simply that, facts. Facts are constant, unchangeable, trustworthy. This is so much the case that the only way to discredit facts or truth is to deny the very concept of truth itself.

Now the idea that truth is subjective and individually determined has been percolating away big time for at least 30 or so years.

It's especially ingrained into those who have been raised in the internet age. The last 10 or so years have been particularly influential in regards shaping societal and cultural belief systems when it comes to the idea there is such a thing as truth and seeing is no longer equated with believing.

Conspiracy theories. Fake news. Deep fake technology. Now AI. The outcome of all this is becoming increasingly clear. Escalating rates of anxiety. Depression. Low self-esteem. A loss of direction and hope.

What can we trust? Who can we trust?

You may have heard the story of the two fellows sitting at a bar engaged in a deep discussion about the meaning of life. The subject turned to faith and one of the fellows eventually asked the other, "well what do you believe?"

After a moment's silence the other responded, "I believe I'll have another drink". What we believe, and or don't believe, will shape how we behave.

As we work through the Creed we will look at what we believe and why. I hope the result will be that our convictions will be strengthened. Which in turn will allow our convictions to exert a greater influence on our lives.

One thing for sure. Half hearted faith is not recommended.

Let's unpack a little the passage we heard from the book of Revelation, and the letter of warning that Jesus dictated to John for the church in Laodicea.

Background. Laodicea was a sizeable and influential city. It had a great reputation and was proudly self self sufficient. It even refused help from Rome on two occasions when nearby volcanic eruptions badly damaged the city. It's ok we don't need anyone's help thanks.

The city was famous for four things.

- Thriving banking industry. It minted its own coins.
- A leading textile industry that produced the most fashionable of garments. If you had a Laodicean cloak, made from the fine black wool of the local sheep, you were said to be the best dressed in the Empire.
- It had a renowned medical facility that was known especially for its eye treatment. Laodicea exported an eye salve made from rich zinc and aluminium deposits in the area.
- Laodicea was known most of all for a remarkable engineering feat that brought water into the city from two sources.

Having no water of its own, hot mineral water was brought via a system of pipes from about 8k in one direction. 10k in another direction cold refreshing spring water was sourced from Colossal.

It was an engineering marvel. The problem was, when the water arrived at Laodicea it was lukewarm. Further, the mineral and calcium build up in the pipes didn't make for great drinking water. It could act as a diuretic, causing vomiting.

Jesus warning to a church in a city that was wealthy, cultured, self sufficient, and known for its medical and engineering advancements was this.

“I know your works that you are near hot or cold. I wish you were either hot nor cold, but because you are lukewarm and neither hot or cold I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. You say I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Do you not realise that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

It looked like the city, and the church within it, were resource rich but spiritually poor. Maybe their faith was more set on themselves and their own abilities than God.

Creeds point us Godward. They add backbone and substance to our faith. They help us articulate and appreciate what it is we believe as a community of faith sourced and centred on the Gospel.

We all probably know at least one creed off by heart. It was the first and shortest Creed of the New Testament church. “Jesus is Lord.” Three words. But It would be harder to find three words that could equally impact on our lives if we were to take them seriously.

In as far as a Creed helping us understand and live out our faith. Think of a Creed as functioning in much the same way as the lid of a puzzle box. The lid not only keeps pieces of the puzzle from getting lost. The picture guides us as we try to fit all the pieces into place.

What if, when leaving this church, we were met by a bunch of reporters who asked us why we came this morning.

I’m sure we could all give a variety of answers. But I suspect we might be somewhat thrown if the reporter said “could you give me the key basics of what you believe in a hundred or so words. That’s about the same as the Apostles Creed.

If we were on the ball we might say to the reporter “hang on I’ll just nip back into the church for a min.” We could then give the reporter a prayer book open at the apostles or Nicene creed “this is what I believe”.

Well over a decade ago I was leading an early formal prayer book service and I forgot to check that there were prayer books in one of the rows where 5 or so regular ladies always sat.

What happened was fascinating and illuminating. With no books these regulars were saying every word of the liturgy as we went through the service.

Interesting I thought. I wonder what’s going to happen when we get to the creed?

Everyone of them, the entire Creed, word for word. The next Sunday it was heads down again as if they were dependent on every written word.

I want to encourage and suggest that as Anglicans we are probably more equipped and more ready to give a reason for the hope that we have than we would give ourselves credit for.

What we believe will shape how we behave. What we believe will also give us hope when hope is needed.

Today our introduction we go no further than the first two words of the creed, “I believe”.

In our gospel reading a father comes to Jesus with a huge need and something of a conflict that we probably all have at times. “I believe, help my unbelief”. I know for myself I have been in situations where I offer to pray with folk and on the inside I’m feeling in the human, my faith is wafer thin. And yet so often, irrespective of how I feel, God works.

I’m so glad it’s not about me. That would be a real problem.

In our Gospel story the disciples have already had a crack at dealing with the problem. Now there is something of a theological argument going on between Jesus disciples and some teachers of the law, the scribes.

We don’t know what they were arguing about. But the disciples failure to deal with this boys problem was the context of the argument. Maybe they were saying things like “so much for your faith!” “so much for your ability and authority!”. Or maybe, “you’re following the wrong guy.”

Jesus enters the situation, fresh from his transfiguration. A sense of awe overtakes the crowd. It’s quite a scene. A desperate father with a son in great need. Faith and failure on the part of the disciples. Experts in the law probably mocking and stirring up the situation. Belief and unbelief on the part of the father.

And then there is Jesus.

Let’s unpack a little a couple of the things we find in the text that could well raise questions. Vs 19, You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.”

That, on the face of it, sounds a bit uncharitable. As if Jesus is giving this desperate father a hard time. Looking at the text carefully is important. Notice

how verse 19 starts “he answered them”. That is the crowd and the ones who were arguing.

This is not Jesus having a crack at this desperate father, or even Jesus giving his less than successful disciples a lecture. No. This is Jesus exasperation and frustration at an unbelieving and quarrelsome crowd.

When boy is brought to Jesus the spirit was that was effecting the boy, quite probably demonic, causes him to fit. And for those who say this is just a case of epilepsy, but they didn’t know about such things in those days. We could note that gospel writer Matthew specifically mentions epilepsy when recounting this event.

Jesus asks how long this has been going on and gets a bit of a case history from the father who ends by saying, vs 22, “ if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us?”

Jesus responds, “If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out “I believe, help my unbelief.”

It’s real. It’s honest. It’s enough. Jesus deals with the situation and the boy is set free from this destructive spiritual entity.

Let’s address the elephant in the room when it comes to faith and it’s link to dealing with situations where help is needed.

In this case dealing with a evil or demonic, supernatural power that has been causing havoc in this boys, and I dare say his parents life, since childhood.

The question. Does our belief, or unbelief, limit God’s ability to work? The answer I think is no. As I said before, if I relied on my level of faith before I offered prayer or ministry I would be in trouble.

I definitely don’t have faith in myself. But I have great faith in God.

When Jesus says “all things can be done for the one who believes” it’s important we don’t make “our” faith the focus.

It is the object, or the subject of our faith that matters.

“All things can be done for the one who believes.” The point being; those who have faith will not set limits on the power of God.

That is somewhat reinforced in how the story ends. The disciples ask “how come we couldn’t deal with this?” Jesus says, “ this kind can come out only by prayer.”

It’s a reminder that God’s work is well, Gods work. Faith is always about God and what he can do. I believe in God! The object of our faith is someone other than ourselves.

The Creed helps us better understand God. The facts of who God is and what God has done in regards helping us understand the Gospel is the point.

Objective facts over subjective feelings.

What we believe matters because it will shape how we behave.

Let’s pray, Lord Jesus, as our faith shapes our lives we pray more than anything else we will simply be and become more and more like the Lord Jesus, until that great and final day where we will indeed be as you are,
To Gods glory we pray, amen.