

When You Don't Have All The Answers

June 16, 2024

Sermon Four in the Series on Creeds

All Saints Lutheran Church

Page 1162 in the Evangelical Book of Worship

I draw your attention to page 1162 in the back of your hymnbook. There you will find the words of the Apostle's Creed, and Martin Luther's explanation of the articles of that creed.

You have heard recently that as children of God we are to love one another, to love our neighbor, to love one another as brother and sister.

We will refer to this creed and explanation as we discern what is expected of us, what it means to believe and to love.

I want to introduce you to a new family who has moved into your neighborhood. You can tell very quickly that they "are not from around these parts." They have strong accents. They hesitate with their words, sometimes turning to one another to ask for help in what to say. They come originally from Morocco. But they have lived in Quebec for many years. They are Canadian citizens. They have come to Calgary seeking "the Alberta advantage."

Isn't it funny how we first notice what is different in people, rather than what is the same?

You welcome them into the neighborhood. You offer to help if they need anything. They invite you for coffee. It will turn out to be Moroccan coffee, strong and thick and fragrant.

You will learn that they are a blended family. They have two children, one is still in high school; one in college. Their English is pretty good. You will discover that they have delightful humor. They are some of the kindest, gentlest, generous and helpful people you would want to meet.

How do you welcome the stranger? What does the Creed say?

They are intriguing. They come from another nation. They have interesting customs. They have a different religion. They are Muslim. You know Pastor Wallace has connection with other Muslims. You offer to introduce them. But they are not interested. They want to meet people who are kind and good; that's all that matters.

They ask for help with their English so they both can find employment. You help them find resources with the public library language programs. You connect them with the French community in Calgary. They are fluent in French as well as Arabic. It may be easier to translate from French to English.

They are both professionals. The mother wants to open a home-based daycare. She has many years of experience with that.

The father is a licensed mechanic with a red seal. He has many years of experience maintaining heavy-duty machinery, buses, trucks, and the like.

You bring to this budding friendship years of experience with job-search and resume writing and interview skills. You help them prepare their papers. You are asked to be personal references.

The mother is successful getting licensed right away. Soon the neighborhood has familiar sounds of young children again.

The father is not successful. He tries again and again, applying again and again, interviewing again and again. But it's his language. Give him a wrench and a screwdriver and show him a disabled vehicle, he can fix it in no time. He has qualifying papers, even Canadian certification. But no one is interested.

He's qualified, interesting, charming in fact. But he's.... not like the others.

What does the first article say about this family's access to shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property? How does this family deserve divine goodness and mercy? (article 1)

Over time, you share meals and more Moroccan coffee. They have interesting foods. They have different customs. You learn to appreciate their holidays and rituals around feasting and fasting. They have dietary restrictions. So do you. They accommodate you. You accommodate them. It's not that you end up missing anything. Rather, you seem to be gaining something.

You give them your experience with schools and shopping and medical attention. You explain our strange customs. You advise on what might be sold them as essential - and what might be a scam.

What might it mean that you... and they... are called, gathered, enlightened and made holy? (article 3).

Eventually, after more than a year they tearfully decide to return to Quebec. They have not had an adequate income. Many expenses are different here. They have depleted their

reserves. To leave is risky. To go back is more risky. They came with assets from owning a home. They leave with no assets anymore. They must begin again, as unemployed renters. Strangers once more in a place that once was home.

Are these people not redeemed, purchased, freed, like you and I? Are they not intended to belong and to live in the kingdom of Christ and serve him with their own unique gifts and righteousness? (article 2)

Shortly after they leave, another family moves in across the street. This will be a home for another family with different ethnic roots, a multi-generational family.

Shortly after settling, the elder man in the family becomes ill. It's cancer. He is not able to work.

The women are not allowed to work. Grandma and mother are not allowed to step off their property. They are not allowed to drive. They are not allowed to speak to anyone, even other women, even at the corner mailbox.

Other men and women of their own generation and their own nationality visit and bring food and help with chores and offer encouragement. It is not enough. They too pack and leave in less than a year.

What does it mean to be forgiven raised, offered new beginnings, share in everlasting life? What does this family – or yours – have to look forward to?

Perhaps our creed points to an important distinction between diversity and difference. There are in the Creator's forest many diverse plants and creatures. But does that diversity confer distinction, advantage, privilege? Or are all created in love, with purpose and dignity? Are all beloved by Christ, embraced by the cross? Freed from oppression, injustice and bondage? Drawn by love, beckoned by promise, into a new creation and an everlasting life?

It's not so simple to say these words week after week and to live into these words, day after day.

We don't have all the answers, do we? But the creed is still our anchor, our sail, and our compass. We don't make up life as we go. But we do make decisions that nurture life, or condemn others to destruction.

Lord, in your mercy... hear our prayer.

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