

Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

I don't know if a seed knows why it sends its roots into the earth for nourishment... that's just what seeds do. These days are part of planting season for us, in more ways than one. We, as humans, created from the dust of the earth, consciously or unconsciously seek to sink our souls into sustenance for life. Where we choose to send our roots can make all the difference in the world for us.

With all the rain we've been having, mixed in with the occasional sun, there is surely a lot of growth going on underfoot.

When we know what ground we stand on, what it is that we believe, as individuals, as families and as a church community, then we can live sure, strong, confident and giving lives.

Thus, in our worship together throughout this coming summer season we will be led into worship with the words of the Apostles' Creed, a touchstone of what followers of Jesus have believed since the very first years of the Church; a source of life, truth and growth, deeper than words can say.

For today, it will be most helpful for me to approach it all this way: to begin with some background of history/tradition... to see what the Bible brings to us, and then see how it all relates to life as we live it. That's the plan.

So, where did the Apostles' Creed come from? According to a legend dating to the fourth century, as the twelve apostles prepared to begin their mission to various parts of the world from Jerusalem, they conferred together about the content of their preaching and each contributed what they deemed best, forming the Apostles' Creed.

As this legend passed from generation to generation, it was further embellished (naturally) to have taken place on the day of Pentecost, as tongues of fire descended upon each Apostle's head and they each in turn announced what the Spirit had revealed to them. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thaddeus, Simon and Matthias each then shared an article of the Creed, from 'I Believe'... to 'the Resurrection of the Dead and life everlasting.'

Recent scholarship has put to rest this wonderful legend about the creed, establishing an even earlier origin than the 4th century.

Hippolytus, a presbyter of the 2nd century Church of Rome, writes of a baptismal liturgy, later employed as far away as North Africa, with the central affirmations of what we now have in the Apostles' Creed.

So what we will be about in these next months of worship is rooted both in the deepest heritage of the Christian Church and the Spirit which nurtured the faith of all the generations before us. We will also, by the way, necessarily be celebrating the great festivals of the faith. Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, and All Saints are all very much part of the Creed, so we will have a chance this summer to celebrate them a little differently...

It's very clear that the Apostle's Creed was not conjured up in the minds of the Apostles alone or by later theologians in some dark and smoky room. Each and every article of the creed is rooted in scripture, one way or another.

Today we have shared one of the most quotable quotes of the Bible, incorporated into the first two words of the Creed. **"I believe, --- (then, the necessary human qualifier), "help my unbelief."**

The scene in Mark's Gospel is drawn from first century peasant life, but it could have come from yesterday.

Though it is clearly a case of epilepsy, an affliction well known in the ancient world (it is a Greek word itself), the word is not used in Mark's account. The point of the affliction is that the boy is a victim of a hostile force, uncontrolled by normal means. It is also a condition that will soon enough come under the command and control of Jesus. This is likely not the only time Jesus ever healed someone of epilepsy during his ministry.

The continuing seizures were frightening enough for both for the boy, his father, and the crowd that gathered around Jesus. They received special attention. Presumably the disciples could have been doing the healing themselves, but for whatever reason, it hadn't happened. When Jesus inquired about how long the boy had suffered this illness, the father pled for pity and help. What else could he do?

But there's a tricky little exchange in the conversation, when the Father says to Jesus, (in what seems innocent enough), 'if you are able,' as if Jesus might *not* be able to heal this boy. Importantly, Jesus doesn't seem to take this personally- but rather sees this as a challenge to the power of belief. "All things can be done for those who believe.'

And then we get the quotable quote: "I believe. Help my unbelief."

They are words we all might say every day, words to give us courage for the day ahead, to tell ourselves that we are not alone. The statement is paradoxical, but not really contradictory. 'I believe' affirms our trust, settles us down squarely where we need to be. 'Help my unbelief' admits our human inability to change the future and gives voice to our mortal state of being.

'I believe' is not all about me, at all; rather it is about the One outside us who can and will affect a change that I cannot do.

Saying 'I believe' is not staking confidence in confidence alone, convincing ourselves to do just what we believe needs doing, but the Beginning of the Steps we take to live faithful lives.

Interestingly, the faith of the boy with epilepsy is left out of this narrative completely. Belief is not limited by what we normally assume can happen. Our belief is bigger than we are. Our prayers for others count. This is just the first step of the journey.

The boy was healed, the Father's faith was renewed and Jesus' ministry continued strong.

So here's a question for you. When have you had a moment in your life when you have said to yourself (or others)- 'this is what I believe; this is what I stand for; I can do no other'?

Think about it. Take a moment to consider this, in your own life; what the circumstances were when you said to yourself, somehow, 'this is what I believe'- 'this is what must do', when faith became real, existential, part of who you are and forever will be. Take some time to consider this in your life... Maybe it happened at the bedside of a loved one passing, or funeral service; maybe it was a decision you had to make, like it or not, but it is now a clear memory that sticks with you.

Take some time, now, to consider- reflect, and remember... [If you are reading this, spend a minute or two reflecting, and jot the memory down. Really.]

With this memory you now have a way to discover what it means to believe, to begin to sink your roots into a source from which life can be drawn, and along with it nourishment, hope, goodness, - enough caring to share, enough love to give away, and enough strength to know that we ourselves are all part of God's good creation, loved and cherished by our creator from the foundations of the world to the end of time.

That is what I believe. Amen.