"MAKER OF HEAVEN & EARTH"

TEXT: GENESIS 1: 1-5 ESV

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

THE COUNCIL OF THE CREED

We say the Nicene Creed together on communion Sundays as a statement of our faith before coming to the table. I regularly remind us, as I remind myself, that a creed is not *recited,* but *uttered.* It's the difference between a poem you've memorized for school and your wedding vows, when you publicly proclaim the intentions of your heart for all to hear as you jump in with both feet.

The earliest, unofficial creed was simply "Jesus is Lord," which was, once upon a time, enough to get you killed by the Roman Empire. The most intensive persecution of Christians—an imperial campaign to kill every last Christian—came at the beginning of the 4th century. From 300 to 311, Roman Emperors (Diocletian and Maximian) intended religious genocide of all followers of Christ. In 312, God converted the Emperor Constantine and the world changed. Christianity was at first tolerated, then embraced, in what is perhaps the most dramatic 180 turnaround in all history.

For over 250 years, from the day of Pentecost, Christianity spread and grew throughout the world despite every attempt to extinguish it. We're right to think of this first stretch as the era of the martyrs.

Because of the persecution, coordination and cooperation among churches was difficult if not impossible, so as bits of the gospel went out into pagan lands, the new faith got mixed with pagan ideas and philosophies. We see this was an issue from the beginning of the Church through the Epistles.

But now that Christianity was no longer underground, ideas were freely exchanged, and the depth and breadth of false teachings became well known and the source of deep controversy.

It was a mere 14 years later, in 325, that the Emperor Constantine convened bishops from throughout the empire to settle major disputes. Chief among them was the teachings of a man named Arius, but we'll get to him next week.

These three weeks we're going to look more closely at the Nicene Creed in order that when we say it, we're not just reading words on the screen, but we are recommitting our hearts—avowing ourselves—in the genuine utterance of our collective faith.

"WE BELIEVE"

Today we're looking at just the first line: *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.* Let's unpack this a little before getting to our text from Genesis 1.

"One God" — this in and of itself is a direct rejection of polytheism, which was and is the universal religious worldview of primitive religions. Even the advanced Roman Empire at its height remained polytheistic. It still thrives around the world, not only in 3rd-world primitive religions but also in contemporary Hinduism. To say we believe in *one God* is like saying there is only one correct answer to a mathematical sum. Here's the thing: to say there's *one God* is to say there is *only one God.* There can't be multiple correct answers, just as there are not multiple correct answers to the question: "What is 4 + 3?" We live today with a generous liberalism that likes to think that all religions are equal, which is a lot like saying 4 + 3 equals *whatever you want it to be*.

We proclaim one God, the Father Almighty. Be clear: *the Trinity is not three gods,* and the whole creed is an extended commentary on how oneness and threeness hold together.

"The Father Almighty" — not "a" father generically or metaphorically but specifically Father of the Son. There can be no replacing this language with gender neutral, politically correct substitutes, because the fatherhood of God is not a human invention—it is not a projection of patriarchal rule into the sky as some would falsely claim. This is relational language before it's ever managerial language. Naming God as Father here already presupposes the Son the creed will confess in article two.

God is our *Father*—not mother—and God was Father before there was a cosmos, an Earth, or living biological creatures with male and female sex. Long before there were human beings, God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What is more, God is not an impersonal abstraction like "The Force" or "The One"; rather, God is *relational*. You and I can have a personal relationship with the Father as we can our earthly fathers, and this aspect is indispensible. To have a relationship with "The Force" reduces God's personhood and yours to insignificance. You both become *its* rather than living, breathing souls. We should instead embrace the opposite pole—God is in relationship with us, to us, and we with Him.

"Maker of heaven and earth... visible and invisible" — This closes the door on any idea of a rival power. Everything that exists, seen or unseen (angelic/spiritual realms included), owes its existence to this God and no other.If there are mysteries above human heads—angels, demons, ETs, etc.—they are all under the reign and rule of our Heavenly Father. There is one God and no rivals.

In the Beginning

v.1 — "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

The opening word can mean "in **the** beginning" or "in **a** beginning" or as some translations read, "When God began creating…." All are acceptable, but it is hard to improve on "In the beginning."

God creates the heavens and the earth. The heavens mean not only the skies, stars, and comos, but all that is above and beyond our awareness, sight, and knowledge. God creates this all not out of something else—as we see in all previous creation myths from Mesopotamia or Egypt—but *ex nihilo,* out of nothing.

This was the basis to confront widespread Gnosticism at the time of Nicea, but more about that in coming weeks.

v.2 — "The earth was without form and void... the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

The Hebrew word *Ruach* can be translated as *breath, wind,* or *spirit.* You'll notice some translations will say *The breath of God was hovering,* which is equally legitimate, literally speaking. The waters were not pre-existing, but part of the "heavens and earth" that God initially creates from nothing.

And the waters are not just the earthly seas, but the endless representation of chaos, death, and the unknown—an archetype found in cultures all around the world. It is *The DEEP,* the fathomless depths of the ocean (which even today we know less about than we do the surface of Mars).

This was also the Old Testament's *Sheol,* which was the place of the dead, the lost, and the destroyed. The depths of the ocean were mysterious, dark, and unsearchable, and rightly represent death or even Hades symbolically.

The spirit/breath/wind of God that hovers above holds the promise of life above and beyond death, chaos, and all we do not know. This is a picture of hope.

v.3 — "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

God creates by word alone. When God opens His mouth to speak (so to speak), creation happens—it is language of God's speech. God speaks reality into existence by his word alone, which we also know to be Christ, the WORD. The WORD is The Son, who is God as is the Father.

Scientifically, we know that light precedes all reality—photons precede matter. It is not mere coincidence that the first thing God creates is light.

vv.4–5 — "And God saw that the light was good... God separated the light from the darkness."

There is a suggestion in this that God's creativity almost surprises Himself (don't push that too far). He speaks light into existence and *sees* that it is in fact *good.* Is this humility? How could a God who is perfectly good produce anything less than good?

If you've ever made something—drew a picture, threw a pot, or wrote a poem—you may have had this experience of being surprised at the quality of your creation. Yes, you made it, but it came out better than you first imagined. You see it and know it to be good, which means it has value.

Our world is divided over its inability to *see* what is good. God's proclamation that the creation is good establishes its absolute value. Our world seems to be settling on the myth of relative values. You have *your* truths and I have *mine.* But this is patently fatuous—the some of 4+3 is 7, *not* whatever you'd like it to be. There is only the failure to acknowledge the value of God's creation, which may be at the heart of all sin. As Eve doubted the goodness of God's command, she became vulnerable, and she and Adam fell from the grace of eternal life. They failed to *see* what is good, and paid the price.

Three Points To Remember

Three points we can take from this first phrase of the Nicene Creed:

1. No Cosmic Dualism. No eternal evil counter-principle, no dark rival power. If God made all things, visible and invisible, then nothing — not chaos, not death, not whatever is oppressing you this week — exists outside His sovereign authorship. We have one God, who is Our Father, who is greater and above every power in this world that could wreck and destroy us. God is greater, and God is good.

2. Above, but not Distant. God is not impersonal, cold, and judgmental, but relational, loving, and engaged with us in helping, healing, and restoring His good creation even through our hands. He is our Loving Heavenly Father. Therefore we remain vigilant against the idea of God being an abstract force or a pantheistic soup of all things visible or invisible. He is Lord of all—and loving Lord over all.

3. Be Clear: No intermediaries. As God creates all things and sustains all things, we have no need of intermediaries between us and God. There was Christ, but Christ is God. We do not require angels or saints to intercede for us because we have access to God directly thanks to Jesus for giving us perfect access. If you had total access to the Oval office of the White House, why would you stop and tell your problems to the receptionist at the front desk? .

We live in a culture that remains deeply suspicious of big claims, but our text and the first line of the Nicene Creed make and confirm the greatest claim imaginable—there is one God, one origin, one authority over everything seen and unseen — and that One God invites us into His loving family and fellowship.

And we should believe and affirm that a world made by a good God is one which will achieve its purposes in the future. It is a world in which we can have hope. Our Lord reigns.