

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, let's start by reading the first article of the Apostles' Creed. I will read the article if you will read the "What is this?":

The First Article:*On Creation*

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties.

In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property; along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

Luther's Large Catechism on the Apostles' Creed, in which he calls to tasks such pastors who are negligent in their teaching of the catechism pigs and dogs¹, says this about the first article: "This Article would humble and terrify us all, if we believe it." Because of a water-down Christianity where we like to focus on "beautiful sunsets, human beings made in God's image with infinite possibilities, babies nestling in their mother's arm and a whiff of apple pie in the kitchen²" on top of it; because we are so concerned with what makes us feel good rather than talk about the reality of how much we really screw up from the work and mission God has called us to do - we do not always sense the terror and humility that comes across in this first article.

What you all just read should make you feel uncomfortable and uneasy as Christians. This is what Dr. Wengert writes in his book:

"The first article--that we live in a created world that comes to us a sheer gift from God and that we ourselves are creatures, not creators--comes instead with an enormous burden. If all that is around us and in us is good, bestowed by a good God and received as a sheer gift, then we are in trouble--**given what we actually do with creation.**"³ What do I mean? Let's run through Luther's explanation again:

- eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses;
 - Every time with look at a woman or a man with lust in our heart.
 - When we hurt another human being or part of God's creation with our hands
- reason and all mental faculties.
 - When we do not use our brains to better humanity but just better ourselves.
- provides shoes and clothing,
 - That God cares so much about me...that he even cares about the shoes on your feet.
- food and drink,
 - When we eat and drink in over abundance and do not shares with the least of our brothers and sisters.
- house and farm,
 - When we are unthankful for our house and the farms around us that feed us
- spouse and children,
 - When we take for granted our spouse and children (I am learning how easy that truly is since finding out I would be a father.
- fields, livestock, and all property;

- along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life.

My brothers and sisters, if the 10 commandments didn't humbled you, this article certainly will humble. Dr. Wengert says, "If we believed the simple words of this article, then we would be terrified, given our actual experience **with and use** of these gifts. But we cannot believe it and we go on operating as if we were the center of the universe, as if we created life and meaning and all the rest."⁴ I need to confess this to you all: I never realized how much I take for granted all that God has given me. I just cannot fathom why God felt the need to create me and has given me all that I have. I really don't know why. I cannot fathom why God would love me, why God choose me, why God uses me. It is very hard to believe, isn't it? Yet Luther says, "This is most certainly true" and you all read that without flinching. How is it possible?

Let's keep reading.

The Second Article: *On Redemption*

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

Those three, simple words: "is my Lord." When I say Lord to you all, being Americans we probably instantly think of Jesus and that is not a critique. The word "Lord" is bit foreign to us but not to Luther. A Lord was a political figure. Lord's were like mayors and governors. They would enforce laws, protect citizens by locking up criminals and going to war as well, and they also would pay ransoms for people who were kidnapped. If you were kidnapped, your family would go and plead your case. The more important you are, the more likely the Lord would pay your ransom. And the more important people your family would send to plead your case meant that the Lord might actually pay it. There were a couple of times Luther when was sent to his Lord to plead for the protection of a friend of his, and Luther being a larger-than-life-figure meant that you had a pretty good shot of you being redeemed.

So when you hear Luther confess that Jesus is my Lord, how has Jesus as **your Lord** protected and redeemed you? "He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death." Oh now that is just great. Not only can I live up to God's standard and for some reason God gives me all that I have as a sheer gift, now I got Jesus willing to pay the ransom for me and not with Gold but with his life. It is as if he pushed me out of the way of the firing squad and took my punishment. How am I suppose to believe this? Yet what did we just say at the end of the confession? This is most certainly true. How is my faith in God the Father and God the Son even possible?

The Third Article: *On Being Made Holy*

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

My brothers and sisters, this is how it is all possible. It is through the Holy Spirit that we have the faith to believe in Jesus Christ, true son of God, begotten not made of one being with the Father who created all things and gives us all that we might need—even our very shoes. That is how this is most certainly true. Luther believed in something Dr. Wengert calls the "Reverse Trinity." It is with the Holy Spirit, that we are able to make these powerful confessions. When we read this Creed and make our own profession of faith, we are actually saying, "I believe that I cannot believe..."

We live in a time where many Christian churches ask its members, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" What's Luther's answer? No, but the Holy Spirit has "called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith" and not just me—Luther did not believe in this personal Lord and savior thing—but the Holy Spirit does this for the whole Christian faith—the Holy Spirit brings us together...there is no personal savior - just Jesus who redeemed the whole world and desires that we live in community with one another so that we might never be alone. "...The third article is the actual turning point of the entire catechism, because everything that follows (prayer, sacraments, living in community) is precisely what happens to unbelievers when the Holy Spirit acts on them."⁵

You want to know how you deepen your faith this Lent, my brothers and sisters? You trust in God. Not trust in the fact that he will save...there is a non-Biblical parable that talks about this. Rather, trusting in God means that you need to trust that the Holy Spirit will inspire you and instill in you the belief to confess these remarkable words from Martin Luther.

"The Holy Spirit's goal is to make [you/us/me] holy, to forgive sins, and to give life—full, abundant, and free life—in Christ. Nothing can stand in the Holy Spirit's way in making the dead alive"⁶ or giving you the faith to believe that God would love even a sinner like you, would send his son to pay the ransom and then give us his very essence to lead us and make us holy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, this is most certainly true.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Now that they are free from the useless, bothersome babbling of the seven hours, it would be much better if morning, noon, and night they would instead read a page or two from the catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or some other passage from the Bible, and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their parishioners. In this way they would once again show honor and respect to the gospel, through which they have been delivered from so many burdens and troubles, and they might feel a little shame that, **like pigs and dogs**, they are remembering no more of the gospel than this rotten, pernicious, shameful, carnal liberty. As it is, the common people take the gospel altogether too lightly, and we accomplish but little, despite all our hard work. What, then, can we expect if we are slothful and lazy, as we used to be under the papacy? Page 380, Large Catechism

² Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 47.

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⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 48.

⁵ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 46.

⁶ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 67.