

## Question of the Week

**I'm puzzled by the Creed. Why do we sometimes use one, sometimes another? Does the Creed always have to be part of the worship service?**

The Creed (from the Italian *credo* "I believe") typically happens after the homily and is seen as an appropriate response to God's living Word. For some this might be surprising, but the Creed is not an essential part of our worship service. Those of you who read the Question a few weeks ago (What is the Agnus Dei?) might remember my noting the influential work of Gregory Dix in *The Shape of the Liturgy* outlining the essential, and most ancient pieces of our worship together as Offering, Blessing, Breaking, and Sharing (Communion). In the earliest worship of the church, it was the Eucharistic prayer which was the means by which Christians passed along the faith, and it was in the bread and wine where Christians found their unity strengthened and their calling

The *Book of Alternative Services* notes that it was only later, when the church reacted to various controversies of belief and when the words of the Eucharistic prayer tended to be said 'by the priest in an inaudible (and Latin) voice' that the Creed came into popularity as the primary way of handing on the faith. It is my experience that, by omitting the Creed through certain times and seasons in our common worship life, we can pay more attention to it, engage with it more thoughtfully, when we do use it.

But which Creed? There are three which are used regularly at St. George's: The Apostles' Creed (shorter), the Nicene Creed (longer), and the Celtic Creed (from our once-a-month Celtic Liturgy). These are representative of any number of belief statements that the church has and does make, ie. "Jesus is Lord" might be the shortest affirmation we can make; "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again," would be a longer affirmation often included in the Eucharistic prayer. I will briefly break down each one of these more formal creeds, noting a bit of its history and when it is most likely to make an appearance.

**The Apostles' Creed** : There is a lovely story that it was put together by The Twelve apostles of Jesus before they began their mission, each of them contributing one clause of the text. In truth, the creed wasn't consolidated until around 150 AD, and was, to a large extent, written as a response to some of the heresies circulating at the time. It was used primarily at the time of baptism – and is therefore also known as The Baptismal Creed -- in order to distinguish a 'true believer', to have them identify their faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then to baptize them in those names.

**Celtic Creed**: There are other, more contemporary Creeds also in circulation in our Christian faith, one of which we use in the Celtic liturgy. If you do a line by line comparison between this and the Apostles' Creed, in fact you discover that the one is simply a paraphrase of the other. It expresses nothing new, but the shift in language allows us to express our inherited faith with a fresh voice, and oftentimes to see it again with fresh eyes.

**Nicene Creed** – Begun in 325 AD at the Council of Nicea – a meeting of all Christian bishops called by the Roman Emperor Constantine – this took about eighty years of conversation across the entire Christian church in order to consolidate. Like the Apostles' Creed, it too is crafted in large part in reaction to heresies of the time, but we receive and speak these words today as a narrative outline of our Trinitarian faith: God is One, experienced in three distinct and transformative ways. We use the Nicene Creed at the more traditional 8am service, as well as on special occasions throughout the year, and particularly today on Trinity Sunday, as we reflect on the witness of who God is, how we know God, and what that means for our lives.

Martha