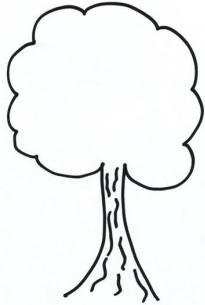


Week 5

the creed: i believe in the holy catholic church & the communion of saints



- Welcome (5-10 minutes)

Family trees are a popular pastime among people of a certain generation! On the BBC's 'Who do you think you are?' Matthew Pinsent discovered an ancestral lineage that took him back through the lines of the Kings of England and ultimately to being a direct descendant of God Himself! Talk about what types of person you would like to find in your ancestry!

- Worship (10-15 minutes)



pray!

*Thy hand, O God, has guided
Thy flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
Full clear, on every page;
Our fathers owned Thy goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness,
"One Church, one Faith, one Lord."*

- Word (50 minutes)

We all know that our church is a tiny part of God's kingdom. Other denominations (or different churches) that hold to the great ecumenical creedal statements such as the one below are also under Christ's authority and share in his work, worship and witness.

Read the Apostles' Creed together.

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

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our
Lord.*

*He was conceived by the power of the
Holy Spirit*

and born of the Virgin Mary.

*He 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,

*and is seated at the right hand of the
Father...*

*...He will come again to judge the living
and the dead.*

*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*

pray

- Pray for the other church communities in the area, reminding yourselves that we are all 'one in Christ.'



Read the passage:

Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ's life, the fulfilment of God's original promise. In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises. Galatians 3 26-29 (The Message)

- Faith is not a finished product when we first receive it. Faith in Jesus evolves, mutates and grows over time and with experience. (And not always for the better!)

Talk about how you have changed and developed your relationship with God over the past 5 years. Mark off different stages of revelation and development on the line below.

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In many faith communities, there are those who attach greater importance to their faith than to the faith of other people.

- What are the dangers of assuming you have a 'spiritual superiority'?

a)

b)

c)



- Look at verse 29 above. Which of God's promises excites you most? Maybe your group would like to spend some time in prayer, asking God to show you how he has answered this in your lives and in the life of the church community of which you are a part.

By being baptised, we are changed to be Christ-like in our inner self. This would be shown by wearing new garments once baptism had taken place. An outward sign of God's inner grace, people would have new clothes to distinguish between the old and new ways of life.

- Are there old ways that you need to put aside and to make a point of distancing yourself from them? Talk about what some of these might be among group members and share ideas about how the difference could be visible to others.

pray

Read the passage:

32-38 *I could go on and on, but I've run out of time. There are so many more— Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets...Through acts of faith, they toppled kingdoms, made justice work, took the promises for themselves. They were protected from lions, fires, and sword thrusts, turned disadvantage to advantage, won battles, routed alien armies. Women received their loved ones back from the dead. There were those who, under torture, refused to give in and go free, preferring something better: resurrection. Others braved abuse and whips, and, yes, chains and dungeons. We have stories of those who were stoned, sawed in two, murdered in cold blood; stories of vagrants wandering the earth in animal skins, homeless, friendless, powerless—the world didn't deserve them!—making their way as best they could on the cruel edges of the world.*
 39-40 *Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised. God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours.*


1-3 *Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he ploughed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! **Hebrews 11:32-12:2 (The Message)***

Our spiritual ancestry is not necessarily of genetic bloodlines; rather it is the blood of Jesus which links us with our ancestors in the faith. Those who held fast to their faith in God and trusted in him in the most testing times are the ones who are remembered to inspire future generations.

- **Think of a Christian who inspires you to keep going! It could be someone you know or a 'famous live or dead' person. (Not Jesus, he is the 'author and perfecter' of Christianity)**

Character:

Why they inspire me:

Share your inspirations with the group. Give thanks to God for the people who have  helped you on your Christian 'journey'.

The real purpose of the 'communion of saints' is a sharing in that common bond we have in Jesus. There are many people who have 'cheered us on' in our faith so far. However, it is not merely to see us 'do well' that they cheer ... rather it is for us to 'get it', to discover the wonderful relationship that is found in knowing Jesus.

- **In which areas of your relationship with Jesus do you particularly need to be 'cheered on'? Talk together about how you might receive encouragement from your group?**

Looking at the Hebrews passage reminds us that we are also joining with Christ in the tough times. The inspiration of the shame and suffering of the cross recalls his victory and ours also. We place ourselves into his shoes and look with the same focus and direction that he

had and we find that we too can make it through troubled and difficult stages of our life's journey.



- **Witness (20 – 25 minutes)**

Being clear about what you believe is a good start to any conversation which involves a level of 'faith-sharing'.

In a similar way to the 'testimonies' in the Hebrews passage, we can inspire each other by telling of what God has done in our lives in tough times.

Share some stories about your faith adventures with each other. Encourage everyone to have a go! You can prompt each other to tell stories 'about the time when you ...' ; but don't tell their story for them!!!

pray Pray for more opportunities to share your faith over the coming weeks.

- **Time for refreshments, you've earned them!**



Bibliography

Charles Price & Elizabeth McQuoid, *Connect with the Heart of God: Hebrews*, Authentic, 2004

John Ziesler, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Epworth Commentaries, Epworth, 1992

5

Dear Leaders

Welcome to week 5 of the Apostle's Creed!

It has been challenging yet rewarding to delve deep into this ancient, ecumenical creed and to attempt to scratch the surface of its riches! I hope you are finding plenty of opportunities within the sessions to feed the soul through prayer as well as the mind through rigorous discussion!

Please think about joining the 'Discovering Prayer' sessions on 16, 23 & 30 November. All Sunday evenings; 7-30 til 9 sharp. I need to know this coming week if you or others wish to attend. The sessions are consecutive and build on the previous one, so a short commitment of 3 weeks is necessary. (It's a 'course')

Housegroups' Party is on 12th December ... please ask members to put the date in their diaries.

Also, please remind group members about the reading rota at church which is now on a 'sign-up' basis. New voices would be much appreciated!

Have a great time and enjoy your group this week

Every Blessing

catherine