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Midweek Lent I
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Praying the Faith: The Creed

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“In the beginning, God...” (Gen 1:1)

As we learn to pray the creed together, we must begin here:

*in the beginning,
with God.*

The text is clear.

God made the heavens and the earth,
light and the atmosphere,
continents and oceans,
planets and stars,
trees and weeds and fruit,
animals, roly pollies, and *you*.

God made *you*.

And it wasn't an accident.

He knew what He was doing and all that came before was in preparation for *you*.

He created man according to His image and in His likeness.

That is, He made man to share in His holiness, in His righteousness, and in His goodness.

Man is not an evolutionary accident, or a result of the survival of the fittest.

Man doesn't come from a long process of change over time, or progression or development.

As you heard last week, we have not come from apes but dust.

From dust you are and to dust you shall return.

And the same goes for you.

You were made by God.

And as creation unfolds, man is the high point of it all: the pinnacle, the top, the cornerstone.

You are His crowning pleasure, His great success—
when God created man He said, “*very good.*”

Very good confesses the sanctity of what it means to be man and woman.

Very good describes God's pleasure and delight in man—
not as an object of His wrath or manipulation, but His love.

That *very good* is meant to be spoken over all mankind.

No matter what race or ethnicity,
gender or social status,
age or weight—

it's meant for all of us.

But God's *very good* wasn't good enough for us.

It wasn't good enough that He made us, and provided for us,
and promised to give us all we need to support this body and life.

We wanted more and took more and got more.
And so we fell from *very good*, we got what we wanted.
We fell from life to death,
from joy to hate,
and from peace to constant struggle;
and so we were broken.

No longer could we praise or delight in God—
we fell even from that.
No longer could we pray or be heard or seek the good.

This side of the fall we are enemies—
not by God's choice or will, but ours.
That's the way we want it in our sin.

And that's why we need the Second Article of the Creed.
If all we had was the first, we'd be left in despair.
For the good and gracious God who created us and made us after His own image and likeness,
has not forced us into submission, or chained us to the singing of His praises.

No, this Father above has cried deeply as He watched us walk away—
longing to have us as His own, He coerces none.

If all we had was the Father, we'd have a God who gives unimaginably good gifts,
but with no one to give them to anymore.

But all that we hear of the Son turns things around.
With the Son we hear a very different story about us.
In Christ, we no longer hear of me or you apart from God.
No longer do we hear of the rejection of gifts,
but of giving and receiving going on again.

In Christ God is well pleased;
and the second article of the creed locates you within Christ.
So, in *you* God is well pleased.

Listen to Luther here:

“Here you must also consider, and not doubt, that you are among the redeemed, and emphasize the word ahead of all other words: *Our*. So the creed says “Jesus Christ *our* Lord.” So He also suffered *for us*, died *for us*, rose again *for us*, and all that He has done is for *us* and applies to *us*. You are included in the *our*, as the Word itself demonstrates.”¹

¹ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 29.

Jesus does us no good if He's not for *us* as *our* Lord.
 No matter whether He's a prophet or great teacher, or even the Son of God—
 unless He's this *for us*, we're still lost and cut off from the gifts of the Father.

But how do you know that this Jesus is *for us*?
 You can't go get this Jesus,
 or choose Him,
 or decide you'd like to follow Him.

As we hear in our Gospel today,
 "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him."

How does the Father draw?

He draws always by His Spirit,
 who attaches Himself always and only to the Word!

God the Father sends His Spirit by way of the Word.
 And that Word is always and only the Word of Jesus, the Son.

This Spirit uses the Word to teach us who we are apart from God—
 we call that the *Law*.

And then this same Spirit uses the Word to teach us who this Christ is *for us*!
 He proclaims Him to be *OUR* Lord.
 He writes us into His story,
 takes our sin and places it in His hands,
 and lets our death die in this Son of God.
 And when that's all said and done,
 the Holy Spirit says,
 "Go in peace, you are free."

So the First Article of the Creed teaches us who God is and what He does,
 and that everything is intended for us as gift.
 And the Second Article of the Creed teaches us that this gift-giving-God is *for us* in Christ:
 for us in His suffering, for us in His death, for us in His resurrection,
 for us in His descent to hell and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father.
 It's all God with His gifts for us in Christ.
 And then it's only by the Third Article that we know any of it at all.

We'd be utterly cut off from God and His gifts in His Son,
 if it weren't for the Spirit who delivers and gives and enlightens and bestows.

And now there's much to be thankful for.
 So many gifts.
 Some of the biggies are life, forgiveness, peace, joy, freedom, and being again with God.

And all the littler gifts are still just as much gift,
 just as much flowing from this gift-giving-God,
 just as much *for you* as everything else.

Our confession is simple:

we've not had God as the gift-giving sort.
 We've been unthankful and ungrateful.
 We've thought of God as an angry, sword-wheeling sort of God.
 We've wanted to have God in our way and apart from His Son or His Spirit.
 We've rejected the ways of God, the ways of His gifts, we've refused to give gifts.
 We've not always delighted in hearing the Word,
 which carries the Spirit,
 who delivers the Christ,
 who is the Image of the eternal God *for us*.

And so we pray:

O heavenly Father, who gives gifts of undeserved magnitude,
 treat us not as our sins deserve, but as those forgiven by the blood of Your Son.
 Call us again by Your Word and Spirit;
 enlighten our hearts;
 sanctify us in Your truth;
 and surround us again with your gift-giving love,
 so that we also may rejoice with thankfulness and praise,
 and give Your good and gracious gifts to others.

In the name of Jesus, Your Son, *our* Lord,
 who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit