

Interactive lesson

Hx of Apostles Creed



picture from MMMS collection

Does anyone know what the earliest church was like, after Pentecost?

The book of Acts describes people coming together and sharing all they had in worship of God. Do you think that harmony lasted long?

We like to think of there being a unified view of events from day one, but even the apostles had different perspectives on what happened. Yet the core message was constant, and they taught it to all who would listen. What do you think happened after the apostles died?

A lot of people were putting different thoughts and ideas about Jesus out there. How was the spread of heresies held in check?

As people joined the community through baptism, they were asked key questions like we use today, such as “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?” “Do you believe in Christ Jesus?” and so forth. What do you think that liturgy sounded like?

The basic wording of what is now the Apostles’ Creed was recorded by Hippolytus of Rome in the early 200’s as part of the earliest church records on baptism. Through the ages, the core message of the Good News was maintained in part through use of creeds like it.

Do you think it was important for everyone in the community to express the same beliefs in God? Why?

What happens if we do not focus on God first when trying to live in community?

How do we help others to see that God's ways are best for all?

Is this done more effectively from a distance or face-to-face?

If we learned nothing else from the pandemic, I think we observed that face-to-face interactions are much more impactful than distance communications.

What kind of communications do you have with God?

Moses was lauded as the most powerful prophet, with an epithet of having been face-to-face with God. The disciples were face-to-face with Jesus; at Pentecost, they were face-to-face with the Holy Spirit. Each of those did powerful work for the Lord on this Earth.

May we all strive to know God more closely, seeking to share the love of Jesus face-to-face with all whom we encounter through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel lesson

Last week we heard angry Pharisees try to set up Jesus for treason in front of the Herodians. When that did not work, they had Sadducees ask Him a trick question about the resurrection, about which he

straightened them out. That brings us to:



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credit: LUMO

Matthew 22:34-46

NRSV

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together,

³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

³⁷ He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.

³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

⁴² "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David."

⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David by

the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"?'

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Love the Lord Your God">

TFWS #2168>

Message: Face to Face



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-end-in-sight/twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-second-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Gracious Lord, we know that we do not love as fully or as well as You would have us do.

As we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may understand how to share Your forgiveness and accept Your help for living out Your love. Amen.

We conclude “The End in Sight” series thinking about what it would be like to be “Face to Face” with the people of God:

“We continue to envision what it would be like to live in the kin-dom of God as a community of faith. But this week, we focus on the doing.

How do we live in community, face to face with the people Jesus told us to serve?”



picture from MMMS collection

How many of you are familiar with the song, “California Dreamin’” by the Mamas and Papas, or by the Beach Boys? I heard a remake of it that Keven was playing, by an artist who took some liberties with the melody and phrasing. It reminded me of elevator music, which kind of tells you how well I liked it.

But I got to thinking, so many songs and stories are retold in new contexts, and each has an impact where they are heard. The format is a means for getting the message across to a new audience, that may not relate as well to the old format.

Then I think about God’s message of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation for humanity, and I think about how that message has been told through the scriptures and through history for us.

God had promised Abraham that the world would be blessed by his family, and that Abraham's family would have a land in which to live. After their enslavement in Egypt, God sent Moses to proclaim their freedom and to teach them how to worship God. We have been reading about those lessons over the past months, as they traveled through the desert.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/wcy-numbers2/>

Like the Israelites, we think we know how life is supposed to be lived, but unless our focus is on God, we do not get it right. Even then, we tend to get upset when God asks us to get up and do something, or to deal with major changes in life. It takes God's eternal patience to shape our lives in a positive direction.

In the psalm, we hear the psalmist asking for God to make life easier for us. I wonder, why do we ever think God is not already doing that? Have we not accepted what God offers us? What are we waiting for?

In the reading from Exodus today, we hear about Moses's death. The people felt severe loss, because Moses was their conduit with God. Although we heard last week that he had not actually seen God's face, the people understood that he had a more direct

connection with God than they did – and he helped them grow closer to God.

What gave the people solace? That Moses had laid hands on Joshua, passing wisdom on to him, blessing him to continue what Moses had begun. Joshua was physically present with the people, face-to-face, to help them stay focused on and obedient to God.

There is something about the physical presence of God's servant that conveys God's love in a way that no written or spoken word can do. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about it, that he, Silvanus, and Timothy shared themselves with the community out of love, as a nurse caring for children, so that they might learn the gospel of God. That was far more effective than just speaking the Word, or putting out only flattery, or making demands of them.

The same holds true for us. We say we want to share the love of Christ – to be effective at it, we need to do it through relationships, not from a distance.



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credit: LUMO

Look at Jesus in the temple. He did not walk away from the tests the Pharisees and others put before Him; He engaged with them in a way that helped everyone to learn. When they ran out of questions,

Jesus invited them to keep learning about God and His mission with humanity by asking them a question.

But the ego-driven people before Jesus refused to engage, because they did not already know the answers – and perhaps were afraid to hear what Jesus would tell them about the Messiah. What a missed opportunity!

How often do we, like those Pharisees, fail to engage with what God puts before us, because of our own preconceived notions, preferences, and expectations? How often do we fail to share God's love with others, because we take umbrage at the form in which it is presented? Do not back away; engage with grace!



picture from

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Your interactions with others may be the best message of God's love that they ever get. This week, I want you to look at someone (or something) in your life that is getting under your skin. Consider what God is calling you to learn and/or do about it.

- † PRAY – engage God in a heart-to-heart with your hands-in-hand.
- † Accept what God lays on your heart for a nurturing solution (not enabling sin/disabling progress) based on God's love.

† Stay faithful! Most results are not immediate, but rather progress over time, like a journey. Have more heart-to-hearts with God, remembering to include thanks and praise for the blessings you already enjoy as well as asking more questions.

God wants us engaged with God and with one another in love. This is most effectively done face-to-face, in the same way the good news has been proclaimed through the ages. Let us proclaim our faith now, in community, using this creed with ancient roots: