

## Talk for Evening Prayer, All Saints' Cottenham with Rampton on Zoom,

2 August 2020, Alison Wedgbury

There's a famous phrase about Christian theology that is ever so simple: Faith Seeking Understanding. In this series of talks in Evening Prayer we're looking at The Creeds. They condense Christian faith and understanding into a breathtaking few lines. Last week we looked at the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. What comes next? Initially, after the Crucifixion, Jesus's followers reacted in different ways. The men disappeared confused and scared, some remarkable women stayed and were the first witnesses to the Resurrection. Later, some of Jesus's followers saw the Ascension, the earthly Jesus leaving to be with God the Father. It is clear that everyone, women and men, needed time to really understand the good news of the risen Christ. By the time the Creeds were written, some deep aspects of faith and understanding had become accepted:

*I believe in Jesus Christ...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.*

3 **On the third day Jesus rose again.** Belief in resurrection and the afterlife was already rather varied in Judaism in the time of Jesus. The third day is always significant. The prophet Hosea wrote *God has stricken us and will bind up our wounds. After two days, he will revive us, and on the third day will raise us up, that we may live in his presence* (Hosea 6:2-3). However, what changed in Christian understanding was that the Resurrection of the Christ is the beginning of God's new world<sup>1</sup>. Matthew 12:40 says: *For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.* In John's Gospel, Jesus's first miracle, changing water into wine, is itself a metaphor for new life. John writes: *On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.* In John 2:19-21, Jesus talks about rebuilding the Jerusalem temple in three days. His body is the metaphorical temple. It will be destroyed and then there will be new life.

**Jesus ascended into heaven.** After the Crucifixion, according to tradition, Jesus died and went **down to the dead**, to nothingness or hell. But then by contrast, he *ascended into heaven*. In the Bible, going **up** to be with God is a recurring theme. Key figures go **up** to holy mountains, **up** to Jerusalem, **up** to the Temple, **up** into the clouds. That image of going **up** into an everlasting life with God is powerful today. Just think of the east window in Cottenham church.

**Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.** Sitting at the right hand of the monarch is royal protocol even today. Prince Charles, the son and heir, sits at the Queen's right hand on State Occasions. In the Bible the right hand of God always symbolises power, protection, promise, hope for the future.

**Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead.** In the Bible, judgement always accompanies resurrection and the afterlife, from the Old Testament right through to the Book of Revelation. Yes, we have the timeless love and protection of God. But there are still consequences for human actions in the world, past, present and future.

In the Bible reading this evening, we heard about the Ethiopian Chancellor of the Exchequer. There is no evidence that he was present at the Crucifixion, Resurrection or Ascension. But he came to believe, perhaps in the same way we do today. We read or hear, someone helps to interpret, we believe, we understand, we act, we change. In Paul's letters in the New Testament, he often uses the phrase 'in Christ'. By faith and through baptism, like the Ethiopian, we become part of Christ and Christ is part of us. As the Pilgrim Course booklet puts it, our sins have been paid for, we have the promise of eternal life and we too can sit next to the Father in Christ. A new life and a joyful future become ours, now and beyond the limits of human death<sup>2</sup>. John 3:16 sums it up: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Do join us next week for the next exciting instalment! Then we'll look at *I believe in the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>1</sup> Migliore, Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing, 2014, p.203

<sup>2</sup> Church of England, *Pilgrim, A course for the Christian Journey, The Creeds*. London, Church House Publishing, 2014.