

Talk for Evening Prayer, All Saints' Cottenham with Rampton on Zoom,
23 August 2020, Alison Wedgbury: Readings Psalm 103:8-18 and Romans 6:4-6

In this series of talks about the Creeds, we heard last week about 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church', words from the Nicene Creed. Cheryl explained that those words mean a church that is **one** – because we believe in one God, **holy** – because our church has God's mark on it, **catholic** i.e. **universal** – because we welcome everyone, and **apostolic** – because we can trace a line back through history to Jesus' first followers. Now we come to the words at the end, this time in the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in...the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Creed proclaims the universal truth that God forgives the sins of the world. Only God and Jesus can do that. God also forgives us. We heard in Psalm 103 what the people of the Old Testament believed and those verses continue to speak to us today. In Christian belief and practice, there are two other ways of understanding forgiveness. As humans we can forgive others for the sins or hurts that they have inflicted on us. We can also forgive ourselves. Those types of forgiveness can be incredibly difficult. They can bring us face to face with very dark events and places. I've certainly been there and perhaps you have too. Two writers and speakers that have helped me are Richard Holloway who wrote 'On Forgiveness'¹ and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Revd. Mpho Tutu who wrote 'The Book of Forgiving'². They are clear about why human forgiveness is so hard. To forgive does not mean to allow others to keep hurting us or to be slow to protect others. Abuse must be prevented. Thank God that we now take safeguarding so seriously in the church. Forgiveness often takes time. It does not mean to forget. At the right time, forgiveness lets healing happen. Healing for us and for others, for now and for future generations.

Finally, we declare in the Creeds what happened for Christians through the unique person of Jesus, the Christ. We come to the words of promise and hope: '*the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting*'. Like forgiveness, the resurrection of the body has both a universal meaning and an individual one. Christians believe in universal salvation through the death of Jesus, salvation for everyone. If you like complex theological language, here is the connection between the universal and the individual: '*resurrection faith affirms the significance of embodied existence in God's sight and by extension the value of the entire material cosmos*'³.

Happily the words in Paul's letter to the Romans put it more simply. Here we hear the individual meaning, the death of our old self: '*so we too might walk in newness of life*'. It is as simple as that. And the final word of the Creeds is even simpler: '**Amen!**'

There's just one more thing to consider. When we say *I believe...* in the Creeds, we can be sure that individual Christians around the world are also saying *I believe...* In our own Church of England context, there is guidance on the Creeds. It says the Creeds are '*not private or local compositions, but ones that are recognized by the wider Church*'⁴.

Next week, we will hear about different expressions of the Creeds for various types of worship. Some are short, some are long but they all declare a core belief.

1 Holloway, Richard, *On Forgiveness* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2015)

2 Tutu, Desmond and Mpho, *The Book of Forgiving* (London: William Collins, 2014)

3 Migliore, Daniel L., *Faith Seeking Understanding, Appendix E.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans, 2014)

4 Church of England, *New Patterns for Worship, p.159* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016)