

THE FAITH WE SHARE

A STUDY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

Week Two: "...in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

Isaiah 40: 1-2, 9-14, 25-31

Opening Question: Do you consider yourself a creative person? What is something you enjoy creating?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reading the Apostles' Creed again and talking about what we learned last week. Why is the image for this study a long table? What do you remember about the structure or history of the Creed? What did Hebrews teach us about faith and belief?

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come 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. Amen

Today's Passage: Today we focus on God as our Father, an image that indicates connection, love, adoption, enduring faithfulness. It is one of the most consistent images of God throughout Scripture. Interestingly, the Creed puts the word Father together with the word Almighty. Sometimes it is hard to imagine God as both tender and powerful. Intimate and expansive. Although Isaiah does not specifically use the word "father" in this passage, Isaiah 40 helps us to see these two parts of our Father's character together. Isaiah uses impressive imagery to illustrate what God has done and is doing as the all-powerful creator of the universe. But he also pairs that with images of closeness, tenderness, love, Fatherly care. His words help us gather up in our arms and our hearts what it means to believe in God as both tender Father and Almighty Creator.

CONTENT

Read Is 40: 1-2, 9-14, 25-31 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. For this passage, it might make sense to illustrate these two dimensions of God- as Father and Almighty Creator. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. What words or images in these verses reveal God's fatherly character? What words or images reveal God's might and power? (vs 9-11 are especially good for this comparison)
2. After all kinds of questions in vs 12-14, 25, we are given a command in vs 26. What is it? God could use all kinds of ways to make us aware of His power and might- why do you think this is the command He gives us? How does it help us understand creation as more than just "the world we live in"?
3. Vs 27 puts into words perhaps one of the most common heartaches and questions that we cry out to God. What does it say? What are other phrases- in your own words- that might capture the feelings behind this question?
4. Vs 28-31 describe God the Father's response to our heartache and weariness. What do you learn in these verses? What makes us profoundly different than God as explained here? What is asked of us when we are tired and weary (vs 31)? What are the three different ways that God's strength might meet our needs (vs 31)?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- This passage reminds us that faithful people across all kinds of generations have asked God, "Where are you? Have you forgotten me?" Have you ever had, or are you in the middle of, a season where you have asked that question. How does God's response in this passage encourage you in this season of wondering and heartache?
- God says in this passage that He uses creation itself to remind us of His enduring power and faithfulness. When we remember that God holds the galaxies and seas and all of creation together, it can give us confidence that God will hold our lives together, too. Have you ever had an experience in nature where God's power or creative brilliance seemed especially clear?
- When you think of God, is it easier for you to connect with him as intimate Father or Almighty Creator? How might those two images come together for you?
- Talk about the reality that sometimes God's strength looks like soaring, sometimes like running, and sometimes, like putting one foot in front of the other and simply walking. Why is it important that all three possibilities are listed? How does this change your perception of strength?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

God our Father-

We thank you that in you, power and tenderness live side by side. In creation, you used the power of your voice to speak everything into existence. But when it came to your children- when it came to us- you kneeled down in tender care and breathed yourself into our very beings to bring us to life. Thank you for the way your might and your love continue to be the story that holds us and the world together. And Father, for any here who find themselves asking that aching question, "God, is my way hidden from you? Where are you?" may they be met today with your tender power. And may that power give them the strength to soar, or to run, or to just put one foot in front of the other as they trust that your fatherly care will meet and sustain them.

We pray this in the name of Christ, in whom the love of the Almighty Father was made complete. Amen.

