

THE FAITH WE SHARE

A STUDY OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

**Week Seven: "I believe in...the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints..."**

I Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 3: 14-21

Opening Question: What is a community/team/group that you have been part of that has been important to you? How did you find your way to that community? What do you value about it? What has it taught you?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: What are some of the gifts we receive from Christ through the Holy Spirit? How does the Spirit help God accomplish His enduring promise to be "God with us?"

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: Right after saying with the Creed that "We believe in the Holy Spirit..." we turn our attention to the church. Scripture tells us that the Spirit has a very important role related to the church. The Spirit brings life to the church, gives spiritual gifts to the church, fills the church with the capacity to live as one people, and equips the church to turn out to the world in love with the gospel. But what is "the church"? Today we come to two terms in the Creed that often create confusion around that question. The phrase "the holy catholic church" does not refer specifically to the Roman Catholic Church (though they are certainly part!), but uses the word catholic in its original sense, meaning "universal." It affirms belief in one holy community of all believers in Jesus Christ across all times, places, and cultures. The phrase "the communion of saints" isn't referring to a small group of close-to-perfect believers or people who historically have the word "saint" in front of their name. Saints here refer to all Christians- living and dead- who are now part of a new kind of family, united in Christ through the same faith, hope, and love. Altogether, saying "I believe" to the church and to our connection with the saints means admitting that our life with God is not a personal journey but a communal one. Today, we will use passages from I Corinthians and from Ephesians to help us explore what it means to be part of this wide, diverse, beautiful, complicated, historic, and ongoing family of God.

CONTENT

Read I Cor 12: 12-27 and Ephesians 3: 14-21 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with these passages.

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. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

I Corinthians 12: 12-27

1. What tiny but important word is repeated 4 times in vs 12-13?

a. What does the Spirit have to do with this word?

2. What do we learn in vs 22-24 about the parts of the body that seem to be "less important"? What does this tell you about who God is? About how he sees the make-up of his family?

3. In vs 26, what does being part of the body connect us to in others?

Ephesians 3: 14-21 (a note: all the "you's" in this passage are plural, so as you read this passage, you may want to read any "you" as "you all" to better understand the prayer)

1. In vs 14, who makes up "the family of God"? How does this connect to the "communion of saints" in the Creed?

2. In vs 14-17, how do we see the Trinity at work? What is the particular work of the Spirit here?

3. What do you notice in vs 17b-19 about what the author emphasizes? According to these verses, what is the ultimate hope for all believers across all time to grasp and know together?

APPLICATION

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

- I Cor 12 points out two ways that we often misunderstand what it means to be the body of Christ. First- we think that the body doesn't need us (vs 14-16). Second- we think we don't need someone else in the body (vs 21). Have you ever experienced either of these- either feeling like you don't have anything to offer a faith community, or being told (verbally or non-verbally), that a community of faith didn't need you? Share as you feel comfortable. How does this passage speak to or re-orient your thoughts about that experience or being part of a church?
- I Corinthians explains that as followers of Christ, we suffer and rejoice with other believers. This doesn't just mean the people on our floor or in our family or even in our local church (though that all matters!). It also connects us to the worldwide church and the suffering and joy that happens around the globe. How connected or disconnected do you feel to this wider part of your faith family? What are the challenges in this connection? The gifts? Are there any ways you could increase your own connection- on this campus, in this city, in the world- to some other corner of the family of God? What would that take?
- Ephesians talks about us being rooted in love "together with all the saints." Is there someone in your life- either living or no longer living- who has helped you experience God's love in an important way?
- Based on what we have read and talked about today, how would you wisely and sensitively talk with someone who says, "I love Jesus. I just don't need the church."

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 prayer adapted from M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*:

Gracious God

From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

deliver me, I pray, from the easy habit of thinking

that my spirituality is something between me and you alone.

It is so difficult to accept the idea that my spiritual wholeness

cannot be attained outside my life with others.

Help me to open my heart and spirit to what you want to say to me...

Help me to commit my relationships to you,

that they may become channels of your grace in my life

and that I may become a channel of your grace for others.

Amen