

THE APOSTLES' CREED:

UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

santa barbara community church • spring 2020

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I believe...



THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

believe



These paintings of Peter, Paul, Andrew and John, dating back to the 4th century, were discovered in the Roman catacombs of St. Tecla. These portraits are now considered to be the oldest known images of Christ's apostles.

The Apostles' Creed is one of the earliest and most widely-accepted summations of the Christian faith. For almost 2,000 years, believers around the world have used these confessions to declare their belief in the Triune God and his redemptive work on our behalf. This spring and summer, SBCC will join our voices, minds, and hearts with those of our Christian family throughout the ages and across the globe as we explore the depths of truth contained in the Apostles' Creed.

Because we find ourselves living through strange times as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our usual rhythms of life, this study is designed to be enjoyed both personally and corporately. For your personal growth, it is our prayer that you will find these studies to be biblical, reflective, and encouraging while also containing appropriate challenges for your journey of faith. An additional element of this study is a Daily Bible Reading Guide that corresponds to the great themes of each week of this study. As you meditate on the Scriptures each day, we are confident that you will personally encounter God in his Word and that his Spirit will minister to your spirit.

Corporately, this time in the Apostles' Creed will certainly serve to remind us that theology is best done in community. To that end, plan to discuss with your online homegroup the insights you're gaining through your study of the Scriptures. If you're not yet a part of such a group, it's not too late to join in! (*You can click here to register for a 13-week Apostles' Creed small group.*) As you make your way each week through the Scriptures and the questions in this study guide, be mindful of what insights, challenges, or encouragements you might share with your group.

Ultimately, even in a season of life as unique as the one we find ourselves in, the aim of this study is the same as always: to glorify God by becoming better students of his Word, his work, and his world in order that we might live our lives in greater faithfulness to him. It is our great hope that, by considering the great truths found in the Apostles' Creed, we will know God better, worship him more robustly, and follow him more faithfully with increased courage and confidence.

-Your pastoral staff

I BELIEVE

in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

AND IN JESUS CHRIST,

his only Son, our Lord.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father almighty.

He will come again 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.

I believe...



Apostles' Creed Daily Readings

Each week during our exploration of the Apostles' Creed, you are invited to take time daily to meditate on a passage of Scripture related to the week's theme. Author Richard Peace has some helpful guidance.

"Contemplative Bible reading is both a simple and a profound way to approach Scripture. It consists of a four-part movement beginning with the text and ending with prayer. This style of Bible reading can be used by individuals and groups.... We ask the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God to us, to show us what we need to see and hear through the Scripture....We offer to God all the concerns we have brought with us today; we lay them in God's hands so we may hear God's Word clearly.

The four steps that make up contemplative Bible reading are:

- **Reading/Listening:** Read aloud a short passage of Scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What word or phrase 'shimmers' or has neon lights around it? What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?
- **Meditating:** Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?
- **Praying:** Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?
- **Contemplating:** Move from the activity or prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing himself to you?

When your attention begins to wander, you go back to the text and start the process over again, listening for a new word or phrase. You read it again, listening for what else God might have for you. Or you end your prayer experience with a "thank you, Lord" or "praise God" and enter into the tasks of the day, taking with you this sense of God's presence, this experience of God's love and guidance. This 'presence' sits in the background as you greet others or start work on the report you must finish that day. It sustains you in your tasks. It softens you with others. It takes the edge off the urgency that so often makes you feel burdened. You live in the world of sense and time, but with the impression of eternity in your heart."

-from *Contemplative Bible Reading* by Richard Peace

Week 1.

Intro: Why creeds? Faith and belief

1. Eph 2:4-9
2. 2 Thess 2:13-15
3. Jude 1:20-21
4. 1 Cor 15:1-8
5. Gal. 5:1
6. Psalm 119:65-68
7. 2 Cor 4:16-18

Week 2.

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

1. Gen 1:31-2:3
2. Eph 1:3-6
3. 1 Jn 3:1-2
4. Acts 17:22-28
5. Ps 121
6. 1 Cor 8:6
7. Ps. 103:13

Week 3.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

1. John 1:1-5
2. Luke 1:30-33
3. Heb 1:1-3
4. Jn 1:10-13
5. Eph 1:3-10
6. Col 1:15-20
7. Matthew 16:13-16

Week 4:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

1. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7
2. Luke 1:26-35
3. Matt 1:18-23
4. John 1:14
5. Heb 4:14-16
6. Gal 4:4-7
7. Phil 2:5-11

I believe...



Week 5.

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

1. Isaiah 53
2. Luke 23:44-56
3. Acts 4:8-12
4. Romans 6:1-11
5. Deut 21:22-23 & Gal 3:13
6. Phil 2:5-11
7. Heb 2:14-15

Week 6.

he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again

1. John 11:25-27
2. Luke 24:1-11
3. Rom 6:3-11
4. Eph 2:1-10
5. Col 3:1-4
6. 1 Peter 1:3-5
7. 1 Cor 15:12-26

Week 7.

he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

1. Luke 24:50-53
2. Acts 1:1-11
3. Rom 8:31-39
4. Heb 7:23-28
5. Eph 1:18-23
6. Heb 1:1-4
7. Eph 2:4-7

Week 8:

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Matt 25:31-46
2. John 5:19-29
3. 1 Cor 4:5
4. Titus 2:11-14
5. 2 Thess 1:6-12
6. 1 Cor 15:24-26
7. Rev 21:1-8

Week 9.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

1. coming soon!

Week 10.

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,

1. coming soon!

Week 11.

the forgiveness of sins

1. coming soon!

Week 12:

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

1. coming soon!

Week 1.

Intro: Why creeds? Faith and belief

1. Eph 2:4-9
2. 2 Thess 2:13-15
3. Jude 1:20-21
4. 1 Cor 15:1-8
5. Gal. 5:1
6. Psalm 119:65-68
7. 2 Cor 4:16-18

Week One Why Creeds?

1. What is a topic you have sought to learn thoroughly about? Be prepared to share with your homegroup or with friends as you discuss this study.

As we dive into our time considering the wonderful summary of Christian belief that is contained in the Apostles' Creed, it is important to get our bearings on the role that creeds can play in our life of faith.

John H. Leith has written, "What cannot be thought through critically and expressed with reasonable clarity cannot demand the allegiance of [one's] whole being."¹ The Apostles Creed is the most-widely accepted of all such attempts to summarize the Christian faith with "reasonable clarity."

Yet, as we will see as we do a deeper investigation of the Book of Jude, the value of creeds moves far beyond mere intellectual alignment. No, such encapsulations of Christian doctrine can actually prove to be immensely valuable in everyday Christian living.

2. Read the Book of Jude and, as you do, make a note here of anything that stands out to you.

¹ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 1.

3. False teachers have invaded the church and it is obvious that Jude is writing out of great concern for the endurance of his readers' faith. What evidence can you find of the content or intent of these false teachers?

In Jude's view, the antidote to false teaching is renewed resolve in "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (verse 3). For centuries, creeds and catechisms have helped to ground Christians in the foundational truths of "the faith."

4. While Jude uses the term "saints" in verse 3 to refer to the earliest disciples, throughout the New Testament this word is applied to any who are a part of God's family by faith in Christ. And, notably, the same Greek term that Jude uses here for "entrusted," Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:3, where it is most often translated as "passed down." Reflecting on this, who are some of the saints that served to pass down the faith in your life?

5. Why do you think that Jude uses such strong language in verses 4-19? What might that tell us about the significance of holding fast to truth?

6. Jude gives multiple commands in verses 20-21. What are they? What do you think living out these encouragements might look like in your day-to-day life?

7. Notice that the benefits of such steadfastness in faith do not end with the Christian community but extends outward to others in verses 22-23. How might living into the commands of verses in the preceding two verses empower you to more confidently reach out to others?

8. We shouldn't miss the beautiful promises and reminders embedded in the benediction that concludes Jude's letter in vs. 24-25. These words serve Jude's purpose of encouraging steadfastness, faithfulness, and perseverance. List some of the people you've been praying for lately. Pray these words of blessing and worship on their behalf. With whom could you share these verses this week?

PRAYER

As we embark on this great investigation of the glorious truths contained in the Apostles' Creed, take some time to write out a prayer to God asking him to use this study to do in you the very things that Jude highlights: confirm and grow your faith to the ends that you will know him more, follow him more closely, and reach out to others more readily.

Week Two I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Read the text of the Apostles' Creed slowly. (See page 3.)

There is so much packed in the twelve words that kick off the Apostles' Creed! Before jumping in to this study, pause for a moment and ask God to help you understand the power of this tremendous confession.

The first exclamation of faith in the Creed speaks to three truths about God we'll explore. That God is Father; that he is almighty; and he is maker of all. Each of these things have huge implications for our lives and we'll consider each in turn.

The Fatherhood of God

1. How has your relationship with your earthly father helped or hindered your ability to think of God as your Father?

While there are a few instances in Scripture in which God is spoken of as Father by virtue of his creating all things (Mal 2:10, Acts 17:28), these passages are more about origins than intimacy. But most passages about the Fatherhood of God are rich with meaning and implications for us, as they speak in intimate and loving terms of the Father's relationship to Jesus the Son and to those who have been adopted into the family through faith in Jesus.

Week 2.

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

1. Gen 1:31-2:3
2. Eph 1:3-6
3. 1 Jn 3:1-2
4. Acts 17:22-28
5. Ps 121
6. 1 Cor 8:6
7. Ps. 103:13

2. Read the following Scriptures that speak to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. What do they tell us about their relationship?

Mark 1:11, John 5:9-23, 8:28-29

3. The Bible teaches that through Jesus, we can share in this same loving and trusting relationship with the Father! Can you think of any other passages of Scripture that help fill out the picture of the goodness of having God as our father? (If you're unfamiliar with the Bible, you might start by looking at Matthew 6.)

The Almighty

4. J.I. Packer writes, "Men treat God's sovereignty as a theme for controversy, but in Scripture it is a matter for worship."¹ Read the following verses that exult in God's power.

Ps 115:3, Ps 135:6, Ps 145

The theological word for how God's sovereign power is exerted in the events of history is *providence*. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563 in Heidelberg, Germany as a tool for instructing people in the faith and which we will repeatedly look at in this study, unpacks the significance of the truths we proclaim in the Apostles' Creed. In the section related to the phrase we're looking at today, we find these questions and responses:

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.

Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in His hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

1 J.I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed*, p45.

5. Which of these implications of God's almightiness speak to you most right now? Is there something you need to do? (Repent for ingratitude, impatience, or mistrust? Praise God for his generosity and provision? Ask God for a deeper trust in his care for you?)

The Maker

6. Not long ago we studied the opening chapters of Genesis, so this should be familiar territory for us. Nevertheless, it is a topic that cannot be emphasized too much. Read and reflect on the following verses.

Ps 50:10-12, 100:3, 146:5-7

7. How does the fact that God is creator shape our understanding of...

... God himself?

... the world we live in?

... ourselves?

Finally, let's put it all together. The Maker of all--the Almighty!--he is the one we're invited to call Abba Father. Wow!

8. How does knowing that God delights in us and loves us deeply impact how we navigate the joys and challenges of this season of life?

PRAYER

Spend some time reveling in the fact that the Almighty God has chosen to make himself your Father! Use whatever words of praise come to mind for you as you consider this stunning truth. You may even want to respond with writing or art below.

Week Three And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord

1. Think back to the first impression of Jesus you can remember. How would you have described Him to a friend?

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud. (See page 3.)

The Creed describes Jesus as Christ, God's Only Son and our Lord. He holds three roles that are significant and unique. Today we'll consider the importance of these titles.

2. Read Matthew 16:13-17. What responses do you think he'd get today to the question "Who do people say I am?"

Week 3.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

1. John 1:1-5
2. Luke 1:30-33
3. Heb 1:1-3
4. Jn 1:10-13
5. Eph 1:3-10
6. Col 1:15-20
7. Matthew 16:13-16

The Christ

Now let's look closer at the title *Christ*. This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term *Messiah*. It means "anointed one." Anointing with oil was done to show someone was set apart for a God-ordained purpose.

In the Old Testament, anointed roles included prophets (revealers of God's will to the people), priests (offering sacrifices and intercession for the people to God), and kings (appointed by God to govern His people).

3. How is Jesus the *ultimate* fulfillment of each of these roles?
 - a. Prophet (John 1:18)

b. Priest (Hebrew 7:23-28)

c. King (Luke 1:30-32, Rev.19:11-16)

God's Only Son

To be a "son" of someone means to be of the same substance, the same nature. God is eternal, uncreated. Jesus is in every way equal to and one with God the Father (Hebrews 1:1-3).

4. How is it that we are also called "sons" and how is our sonship different than His? (Romans 8:15-17)

Our Lord

5. The Heidelberg Catechism, Day 13, asks, "Why do you call Him our Lord?" Ponder the answer one phrase at a time. Underline words that stand out to you and note why.

"Because He has ransomed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with silver or gold, but with His precious blood, and has freed us from all the power of the devil to make us his own possession."

Read John 13:13-15 and Luke 6:46-49.

6. What are some ways you can serve those around you in the name of Christ?

PRAYER

Matthew 11:28-30 assures us the lordship of Jesus is good. Name the things weighing heavy on your heart this week during the pandemic. As you give Jesus your burdens, thank Him for the ways He brings rest to your soul.

Week Four ...Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary

1. What is one Christmas tradition that you enjoy?

Though our cultural celebrations of Christmas sometimes demonstrate little theological significance, in this study we will be reminded of the history-changing truths of the first Christmas.

Recite the Creed slowly, out loud. (See page 3.)

Jesus' birth represents more than the sentimentalized picture of a perfectly calm stable that we often see on Christmas cards. Rather, the theological implications of what is known as the Incarnation are sweeping.

2. Read Luke 1:26-38. Though this story may be familiar, as you read, take note of what emotions may have arisen in Mary during this conversation.

3. What promises does Gabriel make about the child that is to come?

Week 4:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

1. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7
2. Luke 1:26-35
3. Matt 1:18-23
4. John 1:14
5. Heb 4:14-16
6. Gal 4:4-7
7. Phil 2:5-11

Week Five Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried.

Week 5.

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

1. Isaiah 53
2. Luke 23:44-56
3. Acts 4:8-12
4. Romans 6:1-11
5. Deut 21:22-23 & Gal 3:13
6. Phil 2:5-11
7. Heb 2:14-15

1. Think for a moment about something that has truly shocked, surprised, or even offended you. What was it, and why did it have this effect on you?

When I (Caleb) was in college, I worked at the same summer camp we take our junior high school students to. One memory that has stuck with me from my time working at camp is the reaction one student

had to hearing about Jesus' death and the reason for his death: sin. He was completely shocked, appalled even, that the same Jesus he had heard about all week doing amazing things was wrongly accused, mocked, and executed as a criminal. At first I felt like I needed to correct his reaction, but the more I have reflected the more I have realized he was the one correcting me. If the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus, of God, on our behalf doesn't move and even shock us, then perhaps we are the ones who need correcting.

Read Luke 23 and take in the story.

2. Read Luke 23 again, I know you will be tempted to skip this step, but don't. Take some time and read it again. Take note of any details that stick out to you, surprise you, or you missed the first time round. (For example, I had never previously noticed that Herod and Pilate became friends.)

3. I promise this is the last time, but read Luke 23 again. This time write down any and all questions you have about the text. (One of mine: It seems to me that Luke emphasizes the verbal and emotional abuse Jesus received and says little of the physical suffering. Why is that?)

4. During Jesus' trials under Pilate, what reasons are given for Jesus to be put to death? How do these conversations underline the true reason for his death?

5. In verses 39-43, both criminals make requests of Jesus. What is the difference between the two requests? What do these verses teach us about how we are saved?

6. Look at each Matthew 27:45-54, Mark 15:33-39, and Luke 23:44-47. What do the supernatural events coinciding with Jesus' death tell us about its significance?

7. Read Romans 6:1-11. According to Paul, what did Christ's death accomplish for us?

8. Now, let's get practical. How does the death of Jesus on account of our sins impact your daily life? If your answer is, "Not much," try to imagine how greater awareness of it might influence your daily life and then write down some thoughts here.

PRAYER

Take some time to consider why Jesus came down from heaven and was crucified, dead, and buried. Take time to confess your sins to God. Thank God for the grace and forgiveness available through Jesus Christ. Praise God that his love for us was so great that he made a way for our redemption from sin and death.

Week Six He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.

1. Who is someone you've known and loved that has died? What's one cherished memory you have of them?

At some point, the fact of death will touch close to home for every one of us. In this study, we're going to explore how the death and resurrection of Jesus matters significantly to our faith and our hope.

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud. (See page 3.)

In today's section we come to a line with a murky past – “he descended to the dead,” or as you may be more familiar with it, “he descended into hell.” This phrase was not found in the earliest versions of the creed and when it appears for the first time, in AD 390, it clearly does not refer to hell (Greek: Gehenna), but to the place of the dead (Greek: Hades). As Wayne Grudem puts it, “Rufinus, the only person who included it before A.D. 650, did not think it meant that Christ descended into hell, but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was ‘buried’” (Grudem, Systematic Theology, p586).

Of course, we've already confessed that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. So why include the line at all? That is a good question and why Christians may land at different conclusions. Some may exclude it altogether since it has a questionable past and may be understood as redundant. Some may understand it to mean that Christ experienced spiritual suffering, which was hellish, by nature of his death for our sins. And some may choose to see this as simply another emphatic statement that he fully experienced death like the rest of humanity.

2. Some may prefer rendering this phrase as “he descended into hell.” If that's you, share what that means to you and some Scriptures that align with your understanding.

Week 6.

he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again

1. John 11:25-27
2. Luke 24:1-11
3. Rom 6:3-11
4. Eph 2:1-10
5. Col 3:1-4
6. 1 Peter 1:3-5
7. 1 Cor 15:12-26

Of course, “he descended...” provides a fitting contrast and set up for “he rose again...”. The resurrection is at the center of the creed and of course is at the center of our faith.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-32.

Over the course of the centuries, some have tried to frame Jesus' resurrection as a spiritual rather than physical or historical event. Early Christians would have no part of that!

3. What evidence does Paul cite for Jesus' physical, historical resurrection?

4. Try to follow Paul's logic about the importance of Jesus' resurrection. What are the consequences if there is no resurrection of the dead/if Christ had not risen from the dead?

Don't get hung up on 15:29 which mentions baptism for the dead. While this verse gets interpreted in different ways by various scholars, it seems best to understand that Paul is not referring to normal Christian practice (notice his use of generic “people” in verse 29 and his use of “we” in verse 30), but is rather indicating that even those Corinthians whose practice he does not condone points to the reality of the resurrection.

5. In verse 19 Paul says, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Is he suggesting that our faith has no value for the present? If not, what do you understand him to be saying?

In verses 30-32, Paul makes the connection between our belief in the resurrection and our ability to make sense of our present sufferings.

Read Romans 8:18-25. Here again Paul is bringing together our experience of suffering with our hope of glory (bodily resurrection).

6. How can the resurrection of Jesus help sustain you in times of suffering?

PRAYER

Thank God for the love which led him to send his Son in the flesh to be given over to death and for the power he exerted when he raised Jesus from the dead! Ask the Spirit of God to conform us to the crucified and risen Son of God, so that we, too, may live as those who are dead to sin and alive to God.

Week Seven He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father almighty.

Week 7.

he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

1. Luke 24:50-53
2. Acts 1:1-11
3. Rom 8:31-39
4. Heb 7:23-28
5. Eph 1:18-23
6. Heb 1:1-4
7. Eph 2:4-7

Most Christians do a fairly good job of remembering and pondering Christmas, Easter and even anticipating the eventual return of Christ. But have you ever wondered where Jesus has been and what he has been doing for the last 2000 years or so?

The Apostles' Creed, relying on numerous scriptures, helps us with the words: He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

1. It's easy to spend time thinking about Jesus' death and resurrection, and pass over his ascension into heaven. Read Luke 24:50-53 and Mark 16:19. Write down any questions or observations that arise.

2. Read Acts 1:6-11. What do you learn about the ascension from the passage? In what sense did Jesus go to heaven?

3. Read these passages that refer to Jesus sitting at the right hand of God the Father almighty: Acts 2:32-35, Romans 8:33-35, Hebrews 1:3,13, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 12:2. What does it signify that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father?

4. Read Romans 8:34-35 and Hebrews 7:25. How does Jesus' presence in heaven benefit believers here on earth?

5. Read John 16:7. Though we will consider the Holy Spirit more thoroughly in coming weeks, do a little thought experiment now. What if Jesus, having been crucified and resurrected, had stayed on earth indefinitely instead of ascending into heaven? Since the bodily-resurrected Jesus could not be everywhere at once, how is the ascension helpful to Christians around the world?

6. Now, with all of this in mind, consider the significance of the ascension for your daily life. How might the truths about Jesus' ascension and place at God's right hand impact your day-to-day reality?

PRAYER

Spend some time thanking God for the truth that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Praise God for the mysterious truth that because Jesus has ascended to heaven Christians in every country around the world can now enjoy the ministry and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Pray for any you know of who are struggling during this time-- including yourself if applicable--to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the confidence that comes from having our Lord in heaven. Pray that those who don't know the exalted Jesus as their Lord would come to know him through these circumstances.

Week Eight He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Take a few moments to consider your life in this unique season. Though much has been cancelled or interrupted, each of us still has (at least some) optimism about changes to come. What is something you're looking forward to? Consider asking the same question to a friend, family member or housemate.

Week 8:

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Matt 25:31-46
2. John 5:19-29
3. 1 Cor 4:5
4. Titus 2:11-14
5. 2 Thess 1:6-12
6. 1 Cor 15:24-26
7. Rev 21:1-8

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud:

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

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. He will come again 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.

The Creed wraps up its treatment of Jesus with the statement, "he will come again to judge the living and the dead." This week we will consider selected passages from the Book of Revelation. Though it's filled with poetic language and remarkable imagery, hang in there! Engage your mind and your heart with these verses that serve to highlight the prominence of what the New Testament will label our "blessed hope."

2. As you read each of the following passages about Jesus' return, make a note of anything that stands out to you.

Revelation 19:11-16

Revelation 20:11-21:5

Revelation 21:22-22:7

3. What emotions arise in you as you read these passages?

4. We can all think of a time when we were excited about something only to find that it didn't match our expectations. Look again at the Revelation passages. How do these promises address our deepest longings and needs? In other words, which aspects of these passages sound like good news?

5. The New Testament authors saw day-to-day relevance in Jesus' promised return. Read the following passages and, as you read each, make a note of what the author indicates about how the reality of Christ's return can impact our day-to-day lives.

Titus 2:11-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

6. Take inventory of your own life. How could the promise of Christ's triumphant return affect your decisions, your thinking, your perspective?
7. In light of all that we've considered about the return of Christ and its practical implications, what is one specific way that your homegroup or other spiritual community can pray for you and come alongside you as you seek to grow in your life of discipleship?

PRAYER

Begin your time of prayer by thanking God for the promise of Christ's return and the various ways that things will be made right at his coming. Confess any ways in which you have placed your hope in lesser things than that which is promised in the pages of Scripture. Ask the Holy Spirit to actively point out the practical relevance of the good news of the Lord's return as you make your way through your daily life and to give you perspective in the midst of any challenges you might be facing right now.