

# Apostle's Creed: The Church and Communion of Saints

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Date: 04 August 2019

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[ 0 : 00 ] So, good morning, Braymar Baptist. For anyone who doesn't know me, I am Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor here. It's my privilege to be that. And so why am I limping?

For many of you, you're thinking, this guy is a hypochondriac. Does he, he heard his, it was his left foot, wasn't it? Why is he limping with his right? Well, turns out your toes do not like being slammed into the railing of your house.

And I broke a toe this morning before I came to church. See, they're supposed to go like this, and I'm pretty sure like that is not normal. So, hence the limping.

Good times, and that's why I keep shifting. So it's not that I'm nervous, I'm just shifting my weight because it feels great. So let's get on with it.

Near the end of our sermon last week, I suggested that the work of the Holy Spirit is most evident in the ways that he works through God's people and through the church itself.

[ 1 : 08 ] And so this morning, we're going to expand on that idea by exploring the ideas of what it means to believe in the holy Catholic church, as the Apostles' Creed says.

And the communion or community of saints. And we declare those in the Apostles' Creed. So here we are.

It's the declarations of the Apostles' Creed that many Protestants either mumble their way through or become uncomfortably silent with.

I believe in the holy Catholic church. Nope.

One of these days we'll get these things figured out. It's okay, though. So the slide, if you can imagine, says, I believe in the holy Catholic church. And I remember as a young person raised in a Protestant home, stumbling through those words myself.

[ 2 : 16 ] And many of you can possibly relate. I've attended churches where the Apostles' Creed was read together out loud. And I recall thinking to myself, wait a sec, did I accidentally enter the wrong church at some point?

I don't recall passing a priest on the way in. But let's be open and honest with each other about this this morning.

We're all in agreement with the concept of holiness, right? Being set apart for God. Being called according to God's purpose.

Either as an individual or as a community of believers, right? And we're all in agreement of the concept of church. God's people gathered together in one specific place at one specific time.

But, also, as a greater body of people around the world. And even more than that. A body of people that span time as we know it.

[ 3 : 28 ] A community that exists beyond mortal time. And if that makes your head hurt a bit, I'll still get there this morning. So, if we can agree in our belief in the foundational truths I just said, what's the problem?

What is our issue with these phrases? To begin with, I think I can say with some degree of confidence this morning that our struggle is with the word Catholic.

As it appears in the creed. Is that fair? As Protestants. No, I just realized the transmitter for the remote is still in the remote.

That's what a broken foot will do for you. So, let's not worry about it. As Protestants or Christians who identify with a certain perspective on our faith, we may feel that we're saying something that we are definitely not.

Something with which we do not identify. Is that also fair? Words carry weight. You've heard me say that before. Scripture both encourages and warns us in the power of the words that we choose and how they reflect our character.

[ 4 : 48 ] The power that they have for both healing and destruction, depending on our heart. The word Catholic has that weight for us, particularly as Protestants.

We hear that word and we immediately associate it with very specific things, don't we? We associate it with priests.

And nuns. And confession. Ideas like purgatory. The Pope. The Vatican. That's our context for that word.

And that's not wrong, but we need to recognize that that understanding of the word Catholic is also very specific. And also very limiting.

Roman Catholic, with a capital C. Is actually the term that relates to those ideas that we have. Roman Catholic. The word Catholic, as it appears in the Apostles' Creed, with a lowercase c, means something very different than our traditional understanding.

[ 6 : 03 ] And perhaps the associated baggage as well that we assign to that word. The word Catholic, lowercase c, is used in the Creed, is an adjective, not a noun.

Do you catch that? It does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, at least not exclusively. Catholic actually comes from a Greek word that is a compound, which in essence means everywhere.

Catholic, lowercase c, means everywhere. The Bible says in Acts 9.31. I was going to have us say this together, but my bad.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

The word throughout in this verse is the Greek compound word, kathaholos, which means in essence, everywhere.

[ 7 : 15 ] Do you hear it in there? Kathaholos, Catholic. Author Adam Hamilton says that the word came to be a reminder of the church's unity.

Every community of believers across the Roman Empire and beyond was bound together in the gospel. Despite the differences in language or ethnic makeup, these communities were part of one church.

The church everywhere. The Catholic Church. Today, Catholic with a capital C has come to mean a particular branch of the church dating back to 1504, when the Western Church and Eastern Church divided.

The Western Church claimed the term Catholic, asserting that they were the real church. And the Eastern Church came to be known as the Orthodox Church.

I have the transmitter, Leah. So, do you want it? Everyone talk amongst yourselves. Take the opportunity to pray.

[ 8 : 32 ] Laugh at me while I live. What is that? While I live? Thank you. It's okay. Sorry. My bad. That's what happens when you break your toe. You lose your mind. All right.

So, the term, back to the term Catholic. With a capital C, it's come to mean a particular branch of the church. And we're almost there. So, even if you just launch it, I can take it from there.

Sorry, everyone. Yes. Perfect. Talk amongst yourselves.

I'll catch up to myself. There's Hamilton's quote. Hey. In 1517, a Catholic priest named Martin Luther, perhaps you've heard of him, asserted some reforms that he believed would get the church back on track.

And sadly, not everyone agreed with Luther's perspective. You may have heard that as well. And as the church has done so many times throughout history, it's split.

[ 9 : 44 ] Based on human perception and human interpretation of scripture. That split divided the church into Roman Catholic and Protestant believers.

And I have a feeling that Martin Luther is still in heaven saying, you know, it's not exactly what I meant to happen. And yet, here we are. This will blow your mind.

If you don't know this, here's the church, my friends. One church has become this diagram.

And there are even smaller divisions within some of these categories. Believe it or not. You'll see traditions that you know and that you don't know.

There are subdivisions within each group. Offshoots of groups where someone disagreed with one approach versus another. But again, here we are.

[ 10 : 44 ] And it's long weighed on my heart that God's original plan for his church was so simple. It was so unified.

It was so inclusive. And yet, as I said, here we are with so many divisions and splinters within the Christian family. It truly grieves me personally.

And I believe it deeply grieves God as well. Because in reality, as Christians, we have far, far, far more in common with one another than differences.

Certainly important ones. Jesus predicted this division would happen within the church. And his prayer in John 17 is so powerful as he prayed for the church.

Say it with me. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them. That they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you in me.

[ 11 : 48 ] That they may become perfectly one. So that the world may know that you sent me. And love them even as you loved me. Jesus asked the Father for unity in the church.

And that the Father would make the church one. Just as he and the Father are one. Jesus knew these divisions would come.

And he even encouraged his disciples at the very beginning. Not to judge one another. Just to love one another. And forgive one another.

But despite all of this, we are the church. Not just a building. Not just a place.

But a people. The church, my friends, is the people of God. And that holy Catholic church idea.

[ 12 : 50 ] That belief. That all who call upon the name of Christ. And seek to follow him as Savior and Lord. Are, despite their denominational and non-denominational names.

Part of one, one universal church. As the church. As the church. As the people of God. We are one family.

And we belong to him. Now let's transition to our second phrase from the creed this morning. The communion of saints.

Related to that partial or biased understanding of the term Catholic. We've hopefully come to recognize this morning that we also, I think, tend to recognize the concept of saints.

And the need to acknowledge the baggage that that term may carry for some of us. Is that fair? For some of us, the term saints may immediately cause us to think of someone who has been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church after their death.

[ 14 : 00 ] But again, that's not what the term saints meant when it was used in the New Testament. In fact, this was a term that the Apostle Paul used to refer to all Christians.

In this context, the Greek word for saints is hagios. The word or a variation of it appears 235 times in the New Testament.

It's a term used to identify things or people that belong to God or are set apart for him. So that idea of being saints also represents not only a present reality for us, but also our future calling as Christians.

For those who have yielded their lives to God, we are already set apart. We already belong to God. As we talked about last week, we have the Holy Spirit living within us.

So we are, in a sense, holy. But we're also a people who are in process, or process if you prefer.

[ 15 : 21 ] We're on a journey. We're not only called as saints, but we're called to be becoming saints. And if you see in this image I've chosen, there are clergy in this picture, but there's a businessman.

And there are other folks. This is not a clergy-only calling. It's not an exclusive thing for clergy to be saints. We are all called as saints.

The process of becoming saints is what Christians call sanctification. Or sanctification, if you like. It's the calling to belong to Christ and become like him.

It's the call to love God with everything that is within us. Reaching up to God. And it's the call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Reaching out to people. And that miraculous process of transformation is not something that we do ourselves. But that is, as we learned last week, the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

[ 16 : 34 ] As Paul says in the Bible in 2 Corinthians 3.18. Again, say it with me, please. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord.

Pardon me. The same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Do you know any everyday saints? People who are the saints? People who take time out of their day to call or stop by to check in on a friend. People who intentionally care for the environment because they see it as God's creation.

People who seek ways to bless others without seeking recognition or praise for themselves. Are you an everyday saint?

Do you listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit to be a difference maker in the lives of people around you? I don't know about you. I don't know about you, but I'm not always the saint I want to be.

[ 17 : 44 ] But as I get older, I'm more and more aware of a need to focus less on myself and more on others.

As we talked a bit about last week, our sanctification process, the process of becoming more like Christ, is a slow one.

But as Christians, we have the amazing opportunity to be used by God while we are on that journey. We meet fellow travelers along the way who share the same path as us.

But we also meet others whose road may be leading them in a different direction. I believe that one of the greatest callings that we have as the followers of Christ is to be travel agents for people that we meet.

Pointing them to a road that will lead them to the greatest destination they could ever have. What does it mean for us to be a communion of saints?

[ 18 : 58 ] When we hear the word communion, we're usually drawn to the very specific idea of the Lord's Supper. The act of remembrance that we recognize as Christians whose lives have been changed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

But there's so much more to that concept than the bread and cup alone. To me, that sense of communion is the idea of a greater body of believers that spans time as we know it.

And that there is a connection between Christians who died centuries ago. Even those who died more recently.

And Christians who still die between now and when Jesus returns. I believe that at times the veil between this life and the next life is thin.

That for even the briefest of moments, we may have a glimpse into the next life. Where Christians who have died before us are waiting.

[ 20 : 14 ] My mom died in 2000. And when our kids were young, I explained to them my perspective on it like this. I told them that I perceived that separation as being as though my mom were on an amazing, beautiful, but totally isolated tropical island.

She's not gone in the strictest sense of the word or how we might understand it. She has not ceased to exist. But at the same time, we're not able in any traditional way to connect with her.

She remains, I firmly believe this, she remains aware of our lives. She may even pray for us. But one day we will be together again in the most amazing and unbelievably perfect way possible.

It is simply beyond our wildest dreams. And yet it is a truth and an ultimate reality on which we can depend.

Author Adam Hamilton, who I quoted a moment ago, says something so beautiful about this idea, especially as it relates to worship. When Christians gather for worship, Hamilton says, we enter into one of those thin spaces.

[ 21 : 41 ] When heaven and earth meet. I believe we're never closer to our loved ones who have died and are with God in heaven than when we worship.

I think that's what Charles Wesley was thinking of when he penned his well-known poem that later became the beloved hymn, Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing.

Wesley said, glory to God and praise and love be ever, ever given. By saints below and saints above the earth in church and heaven.

There's a connection between the people of God that death is unable to separate forever. A connection that is so beyond our understanding and yet at the same time so breathtaking.

The author of the book of Hebrews gives us such an amazing account in chapter 11 of the people of faith whose lives serve as a powerful example of lives lived in service to God and in submission to his will for their lives.

[ 23 : 02 ] I invite you to read this with me again together. One of my favorite passages in all of scripture comes in this next chapter. Say it with me. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings to us so closely.

And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. You ever stopped to think of this passage in literal terms?

You ever thought that there's likely a huge crowd of believers who have gone before us and finished their own races?

Who are now cheering us on as we faithfully run our own races here and now? I don't know about you, but I find the thought of that to be amazingly humbling, encouraging, and affirming.

So my friends, this morning and every day, let's fix our eyes on... Fix our eyes on... Fix our eyes on Jesus and run for all we are worth.

[ 24 : 33 ] If you feel like you're running in this life, but you have no focus, or you feel like you have no purpose, please speak to me after the service.

Fix our eyes on Jesus and pray for all we are worth. Fix our eyes on Jesus and pray for all we are. And if you have questions about what it means for you personally to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, and how that can miraculously change your life, please talk to me.

And I'd also encourage you, talk to him. This morning we've talked about many aspects of the church, and we've also explored the idea of the communion of saints and what that means to us.

And what those concepts have in common is that they link us together as believers. They contribute to forming us into the family of God.

Through communion, the Lord's Supper, we celebrate what it means to be members of that family with Jesus Christ as the head.

[ 25 : 43 ] It's through communion that we reflect both individually and as a community on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. And as we celebrate communion together this morning, we approach this table, not as a Braymar Baptist Church table, but as the Lord's table, which he calls us to freely come.

So let's take a moment of quiet reflection this morning before we come to the table together.