

January 6, 2019

Confession of Love

John 21:15-17

21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

21:16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

21:17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

1. What Is To Believe

For a while, I would like to deliver the messages of the Bible according to the “Apostles’ Creed.”

It is said that the “Apostles’ Creed” became a word like today in the 4th century, but what is almost the same is seen in the expression of the second century’s baptismal order. The “Apostles’ Creed” was used as a teaching material for baptism preparation in the early church. So, learning the Bible according the “Apostles’ Creed” is useful for those who are seeking faith and those who wish to be baptized. Also, those who have already been baptized can recall what they believed when they were baptized, and can confirm the foundation of faith through the Apostles’ Creed.

The Apostles’ Creed starts with the word “I believe.” I say “I

believe,” but what does it mean “to believe?” How does the Bible teach about it? Today, let’s learn about it.

The word “to believe” is used in two cases. The first case is that you say, “I believe” when you are convinced that a certain thing is true. You may say, “I believe the economy will recover this year.” or “I believe that drugs will be developed in a short time that will fix this disease.”

The second one is to say about personality rather than matters. You may say, “I believe that you can definitely accomplish this since you are a diligent person.” or “I believe he will keep his promise since he is a sincere person.” In this case, the word “to believe” is used to mean “trust.” Because we trust the personality, we are convinced that the person will do right thing.”

When the word “to believe” is used in the Bible, it is used in the second case of trusting the personality of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit rather than the first case of convincing a certain thing. It is the same with the Apostles’ Creed.

At the beginning, I said, “The Apostles’ Creed reminds us what we believed.” The Apostles’ Creed contains important dogmatic subjects such as the work of God’s Creation, his attribute of Almighty, the Virgin Birth of Christ, the Suffering and Death of the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Second Coming, the Judgment, the Church, the Forgiveness of Sin, and the Eternal Life. These should be well learned, believed, and convinced. However, the word following “I believe” is not the dogmatic subjects but God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The Apostles’ Creed uses the word “to believe” not only to accept the topics of the doctrine but also to trust the personality of

the Father God, the personality of Jesus Christ the Son, and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

When believing something, we say, “We believe that” but when saying about the faith in God, we say, “We believe in God.” In Latin it reads “*Credo in Deum,*” and in Greek, “πιστευω τω θεω.” They are the the same expressions as “believe in” in English. “To believe” is to leave ourselves to God. It is not just to admit that God exists and accept something about God. It is an act of trusting; leaving ourselves to God who is a Person.

2. Trusting in God

In John 14:1 Jesus said, “Believe in God; believe also in me” This could be translated to “Believe *into* God; believe also *into* me.” The Greek word “εις” after “πιστευτε” (believe) corresponds to “into” in English. Jesus tried to say that “to believe” meant going to God and remain in Christ.

A typical Japanese bedroom has a big closet where futon is stored. When my child is still small, I put her on the upper shelf of the closet which became empty with laying the futon, and tell her, “Fly away from there, I will catch you.” and let her jump. She hesitated at first, but eventually jumped into me cautiously. Because she trusted me, she could do so. It is the same that we believe in God and believe in Christ. Even if you don’t know well about God and Christ, you can know that God will accept you, and Christ is inviting you to him, saying, “Come unto me.” (Matthew 11: 28) If you know that, and turn back to God and go to Christ, you know that action is “to believe.”

Why don’t you all jump into the bosom of God the Father and the

arms of Jesus Christ becoming obedient like little children? Now, no matter what troubles, sufferings, or burdens, let us bring them to God and leave them into the hands of Christ. If you do so, you will receive great peace and certain help from God through your trust.

3. Answering God

The first sentence of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ" can be shorten to "I believe in God and Jesus Christ." This is exactly responding to the word of John 14:1. Jesus said, "Believe in God and also believe in me." The Apostles' Creed is the word of response to the Word of God, and our word of answer to the invitation of God's love.

If you receive an invitation to a wedding or other important ceremony and you have a card that you have to reply marking attendance or absence, why do not you answer that? If you don't do in the right way, the good relationship with your friend may end up. Also, even if you try to attend the ceremony without replying to attendance, there will be no seats reserved there, so you may be turned out. A polite reply is needed for a polite invitation. If it's true between people and people, it's more important between God and people.

Jesus illustrated the kingdom of God as a wedding party for the prince by the king. (Matthew 22: 1-14) The king had invited people to the wedding party from early on, but people ignored it. Still, the king sent a servant and invited them once again saying, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."

However, in addition to refusing the invitation, people killed the king's servant. In this parable, "King" means Father God, "Prince" is Christ, "Wedding Feast" is "Kingdom of God," and "Servant" means preachers of the Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke this parable to the religious leaders of Judea who ignored and refused the invitation to the Kingdom of God. But, have today's people also been ignoring and refusing the God's invitation?

People think that the "Kingdom of God" is a place we are going to after leaving the world or what will appear at the end of the world. It is not totally misunderstanding, but Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is the loving rule of God and gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our soul, everyday living, and the life of those who believe in God and Christ. The Kingdom of God is not only what to go or to come in the future, but what we can experience now and here. However, the experience of the Kingdom of God is not given automatically, it is given by answering the invitation of God by our faith every day. So when Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, he asked his disciples the decision to accept the Kingdom of God and the preparation to live in the Kingdom of God.

If you close window, and put the curtains down, the room is dark and the air is stagnant. However, when you open the curtains, light enters. When you open the window, fresh air comes in. The kingdom of God is already in this world by Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit, it is among us. God is inviting us to the Kingdom of God through the Bible and preaching. But to answer that invitation, opening the curtains of your heart and the window is something you have to do. And when doing so, you will receive the light of truth and receive the

breath of life. The Kingdom of God comes into your inner life, also into your lives. Even in this world, we can have a blessed experience of living in the Kingdom of God.

“Creed” can be translated into “Confession.” Although the Apostles’ Creed remains as sentences, it has been spoken by mouth. It is actually words of confession of faith to God. When I hear the word, “confession,” I always think of the confession of sin or the confession of faith. But, most of Japanese young people may think of the “confession of love” to their lovers. However, I think it is a right thought since our confession of faith should be the “confession of love to God.” I think that it is wonderful to consider “confession” as “confession of love.” Believing in God is to accept the love of God and to love God. It is to love God and to be loved by God. In any case, it is fortunate that you love one another, and loving God and being loved by God is the best way of life. Our God, who loves us and tells us his love, wants to hear the word of love from us.

After Jesus was resurrected, in Galilee, Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter said three times, “Yes, Lord, that you know that I love you.” Among lovers, they talk each other, “Do you love me?” “Yes, I love you.” Such interaction will be exchanged several times during a day. It is not because they are doubting their love. It is the conversation that they believe their love. The Lord also asks us, “Do you love me?” and “Do you believe me?” many times a day. His asking is also his confession of love to us. It also tells us, “he loves us.” Let us answer to the Lord saying, “Lord, I love you, too.”

Each of us can answer the call of God’s love in our own words, but also to respond with the words of the Apostles’ Creed is pleasing to

the Lord. When we chant the Apostles' Creed at the worship service of the church or at our private prayer time, let's give the Apostles' Creed as our confession of love to the Lord.

(Prayer)

God, the Father of Jesus Christ, you have invited us to your love with the Word of God, and you gave us the word of faith that answers your love, in the Apostles' Creed. Every time we say the Apostles' Creed, help us to confess it with our heart, saying, "Lord, I believe in you, and I love you." We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.