

**'I Believe...
Sunday July 24th 2016 9a.m.**

Duke of Wellington once stopped by gentleman in street – 'Mr Jones, I believe?' Reply came back: 'If you believe that, sir, you will believe anything.'

As we meet on another Sunday early morning – we reps. again of a minority in Lichfield/Staffs/UK this morning. Most today will not have given any thought to God as Father/Creator > Jesus Christ as Son of God > Resurrection > Holy Spirit > Forgiveness of sins & life everlasting. All of which make up the main framework of faith that is the Apostles' Creed.

'Cogito ergo sum' = René Descartes' (17th cent. philosopher) *'I think, therefore I am'* = definition of human being. In 1990s a new consumer version of Descartes' original – ***'Tesco ergo sum'***- which being translated = *'I shop therefore I am'*! Or a late-night clubber in Broad St ***'Disco ergo sum'*** – *I dance therefore I am'*

Our capacity to THINK is what separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. But **belief, faith** is more than mere mental comprehension- even comprehension of God. It involves a movement of the whole person -a commitment to a cause.

What do we mean by **'I believe'** anyway? There are different ways of believing. It comes at many different levels.

(i) Some things I can believe, simply because I accept them as facts, although they do not make any great impact on my life, nor change me in any way. My belief in such things does not make them any more or less true.

I believe that Australia is a large island. I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. I believe that WWFC will be promoted back to the Premiership, this coming season – back to Duke of Wellington’s response again!

(ii) Other things we can believe that can make some difference to us, but this difference is only of a temporal nature:

I believe that exercise is good for me (I’m working on it!). I believe that all citizens should vote in a General Election – not to mention a referendum!

(iii) But the third category of belief = that which will make an eternal difference & that actually demand some kind of response from me: ***‘When I consider YOUR heavens, the work of YOUR fingers... =*** the Psalmist’s response to what he sees above him on clear night in Israel. And his response is firstly one of wonder at the beauty & majesty of any night sky, if we but take the time to look up. This ‘BC’ psalmist knew nothing about black holes, pulsars and Hubble telescopes. This psalmist did not know that our planet Earth is but one, relatively small, orbiting sphere in space, around a fairly average star we call the sun.

And all that part of a solar system, itself a small part of but one galaxy etc. etc. A touch of the **Brian Cox!**

The psalmist knows none of that – does not need to – simply gazes heavenwards at God’s star-studded celestial show – performance every night – cloud permitting! Doesn’t say, *‘Isn’t nature wonderful?’* – but ***‘O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is YOUR name in all the earth.’***

‘What is man/human beings that YOU are mindful of them?’ Poet looks to heavens & BELIEVES or rather has his Judaistic faith in God of Abraham re-affirmed. For the God who is Creator, is also God who is ‘mindful’ of the psalmist - & all this c.500 years before Jesus!

There is a breakthrough going on here – contemplation of something physical leads into contemplation of sthg spiritual as well. (**Austria MOUNTAIN TOP experience**). Here is a kind of parable of the transition that all of us have to make – from the purely material to the spiritual dimension of life. This is the kind of belief that lies behind our Christian CREDO – from BELIEF **THAT** into BELIEF **IN**...

I believe IN the Jesus who died for me & who rose from the dead & that ***there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved (Acts 4v12)***

Does it Matter What I Believe? (G.K Chesterton quote –

‘People who have stopped believing in God, do not believe in nothing, they will believe in anything’). There is a very dangerous (popular?) idea that it doesn’t really matter what you believe, as long as we believe in something.

But it **does** matter what we believe – the lowest common denominator ‘spirit zone’ approach will leave us with a watered down faith that ends up believing not a lot.

So how do we ‘get’ belief – of any sort? Our beliefs are shaped by many other influences in our lives – what we inherit from our ancestors, our upbringing, our parents, our education, and our experiences in life.

Example from all three churches Essex/Berks/Cambs ministries – I’ve known some who were drawn back to God through bereavement & also those who gave up on God **because** of bereavement. All such events, not to mention world affairs all are affecting our own ‘worldview’.

There are plenty of strong beliefs about – concerning the environment > global warming > nuclear power & armaments > e.g. renewing Trident this very week > workers rights, women’s rights, life beyond ‘Brexit’. Whole spectrum of strong beliefs.

Does it Matter Why We Believe It?

Superstition – it is possible to believe something that is true for the wrong reasons.

Many people may be 'believers', but their belief is based on a superstitious acceptance of what has been passed down to them. Acceptance of tradition is not the same as **personally** accepting the salvation offered by Jesus Christ in receiving him.

Of course it is possible to include a creed in every Sunday service – sthg. Baptists/URC not given to – and yet not allow that creed to percolate into our lives & all aspects of them.

I can recall having been in services where such words were recited- yet a feeling that it could have easily been a railway timetable or the shipping forecast! Similarly in any 'traditional' Sunday service – all THAT can wash over us too.

The CREEDS came into being at a formative time for early church. Creeds were brought in to counter false teaching e.g. Gnostic sects. Disagreements & debates arose about how to interpret the nature of Jesus & the Godhead.

How was it possible to understand the concept that Jesus was both divine & human?

How could we speak of Father, Son & Holy Spirit yet claim that there is but one God?

How can we understand the concept of an immortal God that dies?

Because of the false teaching that was beginning to undermine the 'faith once delivered to the saints,' it was thought necessary for the basic doctrines of the Church to be formulated.

Many who have strong beliefs find those convictions carry them on through life – be it politics, environment, social justice – or the Christian faith

As we have gathered/will gather for 9/11 a.m. services here (+ all others in/around Lichfield/UK/Globe today) – so, many factors built into what has brought us here & how we have come to ‘believe’ – Christian upbringing > a ‘falling away’, followed by renewal of Christian faith > some major event in our lives etc.

I chose our two Bible readings - OT Psalm 8 + NT opening of John’s Gospel – as a Biblical foundation for theme of ***‘I believe...’*** The Psalmist acknowledges God as the Creator of all.

And the (unmatchable!) opening verses of John’s Gospel speak, right at the beginning, of ***‘Word made flesh, who made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory... one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace & truth.’*** God incarnate.

Our Apostles’ Creed contains all the framework of our Christian faith. We could take each element of it & seek to ‘unpack’ it.

Indeed amongst my 30 years of sermons on file & memory stick, I have a **SERMON SERIES** on each aspect week by week – signed copies available!

I’ll end with one recent experience & one QUOTE.

One final reference of our recent **AUSTRIA** holiday! Middle Sunday also wet – as had been first. Protestant/evangelical church in town? Yes – only in July/August! Walking through town, passed the parish/Catholic church – heard really beautiful choir singing.

So - one of us said, '*let's go in..*' So – I followed my wife...! Into a full church – wonderful singing – just at point of bread/wine. I shared the peace with lady next to me > final hymn – joined in! END with wonderful organ piece! **A brief but moving moment of sharing** worship & our common faith.

FINAL QUOTE: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

— C.S. Lewis