

## April 22, 2011 Good Friday Nicene Creed

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The death of Jesus on Good Friday gives us a good opportunity to understand an important part of the Nicene Creed; actually the whole point of why the creed was created. And it also reminds us of a very important thing for our own lives.

The Nicene Creed was created in the year 325 by a group of the leading minds in Christianity who gathered from throughout the Roman Empire. At issue was how divine was Jesus? Was he truly and fully God or just *like* God or a little piece of God come down to earth?

Some Christians said that Jesus was only “like” God. He was distinct and separate from God. They claimed he was just a little part of God who was created by the Father and sent down to earth. To them Jesus was somehow a lesser being than God.

Others rejected this idea. They said Jesus was truly and fully divine; that he always existed and always would. They said that Jesus was the ultimate revelation of God. There never would be a greater one.

Those who said Jesus was somehow lesser to the Father said what do you do about Jesus dying on the cross? God couldn't have died. That would be impossible. How was he then raised? The fullness of God couldn't have dwelt in Jesus.

On the other side, those who said Jesus was fully God said that it was essential that Jesus, as the fullness of God, did die on the cross.

By far the majority opinion, and the side that won, was the side that said Jesus and the Father were equal; that Jesus was fully God. The Nicene Creed's seeks to make that abundantly clear. You know the words when it talks about Jesus: “God from God, Light from Light. True God from True God. Begotten, not made. Of one being with the Father through whom all things were made.” Okay, okay you want to say. We get the point. But why be so emphatic about it. Who really cares? Isn't this all just a philosophical debate?

Let's put it all in terms of our lives and current situation. You've probably heard me preach before that I think science is an excellent way for us humans to understand the universe better. One thing that science teaches us is that there are many things we *cannot* know. Notice, not things that we don't know because we haven't figured them out yet; but things that we can clearly prove that it is impossible to know. And all of these things are the absolutes that we so desperately want to know. You may have heard me rattle this list off before. There's the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which says you cannot know the speed and position of an atom. There is the speed of light which Einstein says you cannot attain. There is absolute zero in temperature. We than theorize about it but it is impossible to reach. And there is zero time. Huge telescopes and giant particle accelerators can help us see billions of years into the past but they cannot see the beginning of the universe and they cannot see what happened beforehand.

In other words, this universe has us humans boxed in. There are boundaries. There are limits. And we cannot get past them.

For me as a Christian I take a step of faith and say these boundaries point to an Other who must exist. God is real. There has to be a Creator. We the created can try as we might – whether it's scientific thought, or eating forbidden fruit, or building towers to heaven like the tower of Babel, – we can't get to the Creator – this Other outside the universe.

As Christians we believe the entire human enterprise since humans began walking this earth has been about getting to God, and we've failed. We cannot get to God, so in Christ God has come to us. We can't know what it is to be God, but God has come in order to know *what it is to be us*. That in and of itself is a huge statement about God's love.

How did your life begin? You were conceived and born. How did Jesus' get here? He was conceived and born. He grew up knowing fully what it meant to have a scraped knee, or live with annoying people, or know the joy of seeing the first flower bloom in springtime. This is all the fullness of God – God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made. Of one being with the Father through whom all things were made – who has perfectly experienced first hand what it is to be a human.

God didn't have to do it. God could do anything. But God's love for his created creatures – for us – is so great that it is God's choice to do it this way.

God has even been like you all the way to death. When Jesus died on that cross it wasn't a *part* of God that died. God did die. God knows what it is to die because he experienced death. He didn't send Jesus off like studying death was some sort of a class project. As if the Father said to Jesus, "Go to earth and die and then come back and give me a report of what it was like." No, God did it completely and first hand.

"Hold on," you might say, "This makes no sense. If God died then there is no God. God is gone."

Despite the Nicene Creed most people in their minds make the same heretical distinction between Jesus as God and God the Father that the creed was written to end. That way Jesus the human can die but God can still be fully alive. Then Jesus is brought back to life by God on Easter. But that's wrong. If that is the case then God doesn't fully know what it is to be human.

I know this is all hard to understand. Don't get a headache over it. Remember, we're dealing with the breakdown of the boundaries of the universe here. God has broken them and our limited minds have not and cannot ever grasp that. But we do learn wonderful things from it.

You as a sin-filled human are valuable enough that God in his fullness has died in order to have you. You were bought with a price. You weren't cheap. God has paid dearly for you in a way that nothing can even pay a higher price.

We live in awe and amazement of God's love for us this day and we are thankful that we are so perfectly held in God's all-powerful love. Amen.