

ORTHODOXY: *The Sibling Life* - week 3

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presbyterian Church of Newton, KS - Jan. 26, 2020

We're continuing our series drawing from the book *Orthodoxy* by G. K. Chesterton as we reflect on *The Apostle's Creed*.

Last Monday was MLK Jr Day, a fitting holiday for a man who gave us a better vision of the future. I hope his "I Had a Dream Speech" will be remembered forever, as we continue toward his vision. But then what if the next time he spoke, he said, "Actually, I have a new dream now." And then the next time he had another new dream. It wouldn't have helped people follow him. In following, they wouldn't get any closer to the goal, if the dream kept changing every week.

One of the great things about being a Christian is the vision of God inviting us into a relationship with Him, the relationship at the center of the universe. This invitation from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hasn't changed. We become siblings of Jesus by faith, brothers and sisters in Christ, and deeply loved by our heavenly Father. The message this morning is about "the holy catholic church" portion of the Apostle's Creed. Part of Jesus' vision for the Church.

That leads to my first point. Keeping our vision on Jesus. As a church we have the same option people have always had. We gather together, we pray and study God's Word, we plan and we talk, and we have an opportunity to envision what our life together will be like. We can live out of that relationship we have in the family of God or we can take on any number of visions.

What if we gathered, but ceased being a Christian church, would it matter to any of you? I expect it would. Would it matter if we stopped emphasizing our relationship with God and started gathering for some other reason? I think it would. This

relationship is why we gather to worship and learn, so we can live the sibling life of the **holy catholic church**, as the Apostle's Creed says it.

Now the word "holy" means "set apart". We're not just any old crowd of people gathered together. We believe we've been gathered by Jesus to be set apart for the work of the church.

We can get distracted though from time to time and think we've gathered for some other reason. If we're not intentional, we can find ourselves docents in a museum of human traditions rather than gathered for Jesus' mission. We've been called and set apart by Jesus to be part of His family, the Church.

We're also the catholic church with a small "c", because we're part of the church throughout every country and every time for the past 2000 years. That's what catholic small "c" means. Every Christian is part of the same Church. Which also means we can be Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Greek Orthodox, or Methodist, and we're still be part of the **holy catholic church**. Every Christian is part of the Church throughout the world, while they attend one local church. Some call it the Church Global and Church Local.

Now as we're looking at our sibling life relationship with Jesus I want us to look at an encounter Jesus had in Luke chapter 19. It's about a crowd of people and their vision of Jesus as He approached Jerusalem. This was just before Holy Week, so these are the same people who will want Jesus crucified on Good Friday.

Luke 19:37-44

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

Jesus prophesied while walking in Jerusalem. Some religious leaders had just told him to silence the crowd of people following Him. The crowd believed He was the king they were waiting for and they were proclaiming that.

See the people of Jerusalem had been waiting for a warrior to free them from Roman occupation of Israel. Yet the freedom Jesus kept talking about was freedom from sin. The crowds were singing His praise, but soon they would turn away.

The problem wasn’t that Jesus was a poor leader. He didn’t come and say one thing to make the people follow Him, then something else to make them turn away. They turned away, because most never wanted Jesus’ plan for the future. They turned away when it look liked He wouldn’t fulfill their plan for the future.

Then it’s sort of a scary thing Jesus says, that if people stop worshiping Jesus, the rocks will start singing His praise. Would that be an earthquake or actually music coming from rocks? Well, G. K. Chesterton in his book *Orthodoxy* finds an interesting fulfillment of this in the Gothic architecture of Europe. The architecture points to heaven and proclaims the majesty of God,

while many Europeans had turned away from Christianity and stopped worshipping Jesus in their cathedrals. (Pg 102)

As Christians we hope to keep Jesus' vision our vision. Our hope in the Kingdom of God is a hope for wholeness, for fullness of life, for healing both now and in heaven, for reconciliation, for joy and peace in our hearts, for life the way it's supposed to be, which includes knowing we're deeply loved by God. We now see the first fruits of Jesus Kingdom in our churches. But we have to keep Jesus' vision in view, if we are going to see it happening, and that's not always easy.

G.K. Chesterton examines why people have problems achieving a vision, he writes, *"Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress [instead] means that we are always changing the vision."* Pg 105.

Chesterton describes a simple example. Suppose there was a man who wanted a blue world. Everyday he made things blue: blue tigers, blue grass, blue moons. He would slowly make progress towards his vision and he would have no cause to complain of the slowness or swiftness of his task. His world would slowly progress to being blue. But suppose, every day he changed his color. If he read a new philosopher and he started painting everything red or yellow, he would have nothing to show except a few blue tigers: an example of an early idea he no longer desires. The same for us, if we change our vision every few months, then we won't have much to show for it, except a few old ideas we no longer like.

Now consider the church around the world. Does the church accomplish anything if it changes its vision every few days? Not at all! You can actually keep people quiet and irrelevant by giving them a new vision each day.

Each day a new vision of the future to ponder will keep a man or woman on the margins and quietly thinking. If we do that, we end up changing our minds, rather than our world. The vision has to be fixed for a person to make progress towards it and, thankfully, Jesus has never changed the vision.

But here's the problem. Chesterton describes society as a painter. Society always chooses a subject, a new person for us to paint and follow. A new sitter for the envisioned portrait. One day it's Dr. Phil, the next day it's Lance Armstrong, the next day it's Oprah again, and then Dr. Oz, and the list goes on.

Throughout our lives, we could probably make a list of the people society told us to emulate as it changed the vision of who we should follow and what we should do. The problem is, we will not make progress, unless our vision is fixed on the right thing.

We should get dissatisfied if our lifestyle, career, or relationship choices don't work out. But if we want to be satisfied with life, we need something other than those to be the focal point of our vision. We need Jesus and His vision to be our standard.

Here's the challenge then, how do we stay satisfied with Jesus, even when we're dissatisfied with our lives, or a portion of our lives? How are Christians to be always satisfied following Jesus, even when we do it imperfectly? Isn't it easier to just throw out Jesus' vision, or adapt it to a modern philosophy, and then move on?

How do we stick with Christian orthodoxy in the face of many new fashions and visions? We have to get the vision right. And get this, it's as important to an innovator as it is to a conservative. We have to get the vision from Jesus. (Pg. 109). If you want to change the world for good, or if you just want a small portion of it to be good through your influence, you have to get the vision right. You can innovate to get things right or you can work to keep

things right. But the fact is, no one makes progress unless their vision is fixed on the right thing.

Enter orthodoxy for you and I. Orthodoxy is what we're looking at in this series. It's summarized in the Apostle's Creed. It's what Christians commonly believe and it's a simple way to keep Jesus' vision in front of us. Our relationship with Jesus and our heavenly Father needs to be the fixed point towards which we make progress. Our sibling life, **I believe in God the Father Almighty**. That's the fixed point to which we make progress.

You and I have a lot of options presented to us each day from which we can create our vision and direction in life. And we're probably presented with a lot of options of what churches can be like. But we need to keep this relationship at the center of the universe first in our lives and our life together.

I like the idea of the artist painting a portrait. She can make 20 sketches of a person sitting in a chair and none of them are a waste. Because she's always getting closer to the perfect drawing of the sitter.

We at First Presbyterian can make 20 attempts at the vision of following Jesus and as long as we keep Jesus at the center of our vision, we're getting closer. We may not get it perfect, but we're still on the way following Jesus.

But here's the problem. If we're painting the portrait of a sitter, rather than try to get the portrait right, we sometimes throw the sitter out the window. As Christians, rather than follow Jesus amidst difficulties, we throw Him out when something new comes along. Maybe we think we'll never be good enough or maybe in some area we find Jesus doesn't match our own vision of the future, so we throw Him out, rather than make progress towards His vision.

We may do this because we're afraid we won't get what we want. But Jesus doesn't swallow up our dreams and desires. He doesn't wipe them all out and leave us with a boring life. When we keep Jesus first in our vision, Jesus refines our desires and dreams. **That's our second point: Jesus refines our desires and dreams, when we keep Him first in our vision.**

It's an adventure following Jesus amidst our dreams, our careers, our education, our relationships, our travels, and more. But the adventure is most seen as Jesus refines those. If we keep Jesus first, then we find a companion for the adventure of life, even if we don't get everything we want or things don't go perfectly on our first, second, or twentieth attempt. We still slowly make progress toward Jesus' vision.

For the Christian life, Jesus is our guide, not other ideals, even if they're good things. One of the things I hoped for in life was to own a home. It was a goal of mine and I saved for a downpayment. When Sondag and I married, we saved together for a downpayment. In California, Sondag and I were able to buy a condo and then here in Kansas we were able to buy a home.

Now for me to get the most enjoyment out of a home, it will not come from getting a home, it will come from a home amidst the good purposes God has for my family. For to get a home, but miss something God has for me and my family, that would be a tragedy. I'm sure we can all too easily imagine stories of some poor man who got his dream, but lost his life in the process. I don't want that to be me, or you.

If anything becomes the ideal thing in our lives other than Jesus, then they become idols and risk distorting our view of Jesus. If anything becomes our ideal thing for our church other than knowing and making known **God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ His Son**, then we'll be dissatisfied with our church. Nothing else satisfies.

Chesterton writes, of the ideal people fix their lives on, *“It must not be the mere victory of one thing swallowing up everything else, love or pride or peace or adventure; it must be a definite picture composed of these elements in their best proportion and relation.”*

Let me say it another way. For a Christian, “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Then all other good things find their place in proportion. If we keep our relationship with Jesus and our Father in heaven the main thing, then other good things can be enjoyed in their proper place. If we fix our vision on something else first, then we risk losing sight of Jesus and God’s love for us.

That leads to my third and last point. It takes watchfulness to keep Jesus the main thing. What I like about the Apostle’s Creed, is it provides that watchfulness. Well, it provides all three points we’ve look at. 1. It is fixed. 2. It is a refined picture of life: created, redeemed, and saved for a relationship with God. 3. And it is visible. You can watch for it.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, the crowds of people knew when He got there He was going to be King. They could see it; they could envision it. But then they didn’t keep watch for it. Instead of looking to Jesus for the vision, they had their own idea of what the Kingdom would look like and watched for their vision instead. And what happened? They threw Jesus out the window when He didn’t match their vision.

But what artist would ever throw out the sitter, if they can’t get the portrait right? *“A very sad artist,”* says Chesterton. Without watchfulness, we’re all at risk of singing Jesus praise in anticipation of His Kingdom and then after we say, “Amen” switching to the goal of fulfilling our vision. The Apostle’s Creed gives us this watchfulness as we fix our vision on Jesus and the sibling life.