

**Augusta FBC**  
**Hosea 11:1-4**  
***I Believe...God the Father***  
**October 22, 2006**  
Christian Doctrine Series

Hosea 11:1-4

*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. [2] The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. [3] Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. [4] I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.*

People will believe just about anything. There is a "Flat Earth Society" whose members advocate that the earth being round and the Sun being the center of the solar system is all a big joke. Members of the "Flat Earth Society" believe that the moon landing was just another multibillion dollar hoax by our government. Here is what I find especially intriguing: the largest group of professionals represented in the Flat Earth Society is doctors; the second is lawyers; and the third is engineers. It is amazing what people believe.

It is as if we are desperate to believe in something, anything.

Have you ever thought about what you believe about God? Not everybody thinks about their beliefs in God. I suspect many are content to just take God for granted, you just believe that God exists alongside a million other beliefs. Others are equally content to just say they don't know what they believe about God and furthermore don't care.

Do you know what you believe in? Do you know why? This Sunday we begin a five-week series on the Great Beliefs of the Christian Faith. Our purpose is to better articulate our beliefs and why we hold them.

Have you ever been nudged about your beliefs? Does God exist? Is God personal? Does God have a plan for me? If this sounds something like some of the questions you ask, then you are a theologian. The word doesn't have to sound that heavy or intimidating. When I was in theology school I surrounded myself with lectures on Greek, Hebrew, doctrines and so on. "This is the stuff of theology", I thought. But to be a theologian simply means to talk about God.

Let's talk about God.

The Bible opens with the words "In the beginning God..." It is the belief that all of life, all that is, all that ever will be comes out of God. *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being...* (John 1:3)

Theologian Thomas Aquinas offered what philosophers call a *cosmological* argument for the existence of God. "Look around," so to speak, "and see the created order, its beauty, its symmetry, its motion." It was Aquinas who argued that God was the "First Mover" of all that exists; and the "First Cause."

But what does this really mean, besides of course, that God is?

A pastor in South Carolina once suggested that to talk about our belief in God should begin by recalling the little blessing most of us learned as children: *God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food...* With that in mind I would like to offer a few talking points about what I believe in God as Father.

**God is Great...**

That is, God is God. We use phrases that I confess are sometimes trivialized to the point of meaninglessness, but still they communicate a point: awesome, tremendous, Martin Buber's "Holy Other," and "Divine Thou;" and the Hebrews used the phrase *El Shaddai* or "the Almighty One." Well, I guess you get the point.

At some point we all have wondered if God is so great, why does suffering and pain exist? Why does God allow such bad things to happen in this world? Why the cancer can't be abated, or why can't the earthquakes be smoothed out like a freshly made bed? Or why can't God send a little rain for our roses and for the farmers who grow our food. "Whose in charge here?!" we find ourselves sometimes asking in exasperation.

What if God answered our prayers exactly like we expect? Every time pain came our way or death visited our family or an inconvenience enters our life, we just say the word and God is on it. We know it doesn't happen that way, but most of us privately wish it would. But if God answered all of our prayers exactly as we wanted or expected God to do, then God would not be God. God would just be a puppet or a cosmic bell-hop or a short order cook.

Let me illustrate: In my home there is no democracy. I was not raised that way. And Amy and I are not raising our children that way. We do not hold a family meeting to decide what is best for the family. We care about their opinions of course and want their feedback, but they do not get a vote. I am my children's father. Amy is their mother. While they are in our household we ultimately respond in the way that we feel is best for our children. They ask. And we do not give them everything they want. We give them what we feel is best.

Jesus said, *"If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him"* (Matthew 7:11 *NLB*) We pray, we believe, that God is great. Yet God's greatness is rooted in relationship. This leads to the second thing I want to speak about God, and that is...

**God is Good...**

Jesus called God Father. Do you remember the prayer? *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."* (Matthew 26:39) When we say God is our Father we are acknowledging a right order in our relationship.

The first belief tells us something about the power of God. This second belief tells us something about the nature of God. Hosea gives us a beautiful picture of God as a loving parent caring for an infant:

*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. [2] The more I called them, the more they went from me; [3] Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. [4] I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.*

And yet there are so many other images competing for our view of God. Sometimes the question is not do you believe in God, but *what kind of God do you believe in?*

Do you believe in a domesticated God, whose only role is to do our bidding? What about a super-hero God dispatched to save us from our messes? Of course, there is the belief in God who is the cosmic sheriff keeping law and order and also the celestial Judge ready to execute punishment for our doubts and failures.

I must be honest with you and say that I do not believe in those kinds of Gods. But many do. One's beliefs do matter. *The atheist, staring from his attic window, is often closer to God than the believer with his false image of God.* (Martin Buber)

Some of the people we refer to as our nation's founding fathers had some pretty bizarre but not uncommon images of God. Thomas Jefferson, for example, was a deist. He believed that God was not personal. His way of thinking saw God as some cosmic watchmaker, who wound the universe up and has left it alone to unwind until the end.

I don't agree with that at all, but I can understand how some may feel that way.

It is the relationship with God that really gives voice and language to our beliefs. Not the philosophical claims or the theological arguments. Kirby Godsey writes "believing in God means relating to God" (*When We Talk About God*, p. 65).

Maybe that is why we go on to pray "...let us thank Him for our food."

#### **Let us thank Him for our Food...**

That is, God is personal. We can relate to him personally. Jesus used the wonderful Aramaic idiom "abba" which in today's vernacular would be translated something like daddy. Abba- Father-Daddy-Pop, every language has a word for it. Pater Noster-Vater Unser-Uren Fader- Notre Pe're- Nostro Papa- Vater, every language has a word for it.

Calling God Father has nothing to do with gender. Thinking of God as a man would be idolatrous. **It simply means that God is kinfolk.**

**Kinfolk have claims on each other.** Kinfolk ask each other for things. My grandfather would advise us never loan your kin anything, because then you will expect repayment. Rather give it to them in the first place. Kinfolk ask of each other. Give us some bread, set a place at the table for me, please hold no grudges, protect us and defend us if need be. Sounds like a prayer to me.

God is someone we can call out to in the thick of night when the darkness scares us. God is someone we can speak with, laugh with, cry with and even reason with.

The *Apostles Creed* begins with the phrase "I believe in God the Father..." This ancient confessional is saying that God wants more than just be praised and obeyed. **God also wants a relationship with us.**

There is a doctrine in the Christian faith that is almost as old as Christianity itself - about 1700 or so years old. It is called the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the belief that God is one, but God is also three in one- God the father, his Son, and the Holy Spirit. These are the three ways in which God relates to us.

God relates because God cares. Harry Emerson Fosdick said that a God who doesn't care doesn't count. And I believe God goes to great lengths to let His children know that he does care.  
*...Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. [30] And even the hairs of your head are all counted. [31] So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31*

It is incredible when you think about it. It is not that we must somehow figure out a way to get to God and have a relationship with God, but that God is seeking a relationship with us.

When we say "God our Father," our image is anchored in the best pictures of what a parent or even a grandparent is to be. I came across an essay written by a third-grader, entitled, "What's a Grandmother?"

*"A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own. She likes other people's little girls and boys. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys and they talk about fishing and stuff like that.*

*Grandmothers don't have to do anything except to be there. They're old so they shouldn't play hard or run. It is enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is and have a lot of dimes ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars. They should never say 'hurry up.'*

*Usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth and gums off.*

*Grandmothers don't have to be smart, only answers questions like, 'Why isn't God married?' and 'How come dogs chase cats?'"*

*Grandmothers don't talk baby talk like visitors do, because it is hard to understand. When they read to us they don't skip or mind if it is the same story over again.*

*Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don't have television, because they are the only grown-ups who have time."*

Oh I know this is a sappy sentimental picture, but I think it has merit. God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food...

#### **By His Hands we all are fed...**

Jesus told stories about God that were nothing short of a radical "new" development in one's theology. Remember in Luke's gospel we have the wonderful image God as woman who has lost a coin and then finds it. Great is her rejoicing. Remember, such language is metaphorical, not literal. God is personal, but more than personal. **By his hands we all are fed** is a prayer that **acknowledges God looks for us and cares for us.** In that same passage we read of a shepherd and a lost sheep, and a father and his prodigal son.

#### **Thank you God for Daily Bread...**

What do I think about when I say the words I believe in God the Father? I think of one who sits at the corner of the bedside of my childhood when thunderstorms would scare me to wits end. This is a father who comforts. I think of a father who relates personally, corrects and disciplines me lovingly. When I say the words, "I believe in God the Father," I am saying I believe that God interacts, God loves and comforts, God guides and directs.

God is not simply "Holy Other," or an impersonal Thou. And neither is God an it. God is one who addresses us, not simply a passive deity sitting on some throne out there, biding time until the next scheduled miracle. When we call God "Father" God is giving a name and a relationship. When we call God "Father" we are confessing of a God who initiates and does not sit back.

**As my theology professor put it, "God has entered the sphere of conversation...God needs you."**