

# *“I believe in God the Father Almighty”*

Sermon by Rev. James Brassard

Text: The Apostles Creed Series; Romans 11:33-12:2  
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A parent complained that the preacher was not expounding enough on church doctrine and Sunday school was just telling stories about Jesus. She was convinced that the children were not learning the core Christian Convictions. So it was decided to let *her* teach. So after 4 weeks of hammering away on good old Protestant beliefs like “Justification by Faith through Grace,” and two lessons on eternal life, the enthusiastic parent/teacher wanted to see if the children clearly understood the key concepts. She asked the children a series of questions:

“If I sold my house and my car and had a big garage sale, then gave all my money to the church, would that get me to heaven?” she asked.

“No,” the children answered.

“What if I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me to heaven?” Again the kids answered in unison, “NO!”

By now the teacher was starting to smile. “Well then, what if I were kind to animals and gave candy to all children. Would that get me into heaven?”

“NO!” the children shouted. The teacher was bursting with pride.

She looked at them with a serious gaze and an expectant twinkle in her eye.

“Then **how can I** get to heaven?” she asked.

A 5-year-old boy shouted, “**You gotta be dead!**”

The Apostles' Creed starts with a belief in God as the **Father**. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray to God as “Our Father.” His parables taught that God is similar to a loving father who seeks us out, who retrieves the lost, and welcomes those who have no place to call home. To confess faith in God the Father, is to approach God as one who is immediately available.

Many of our traditional prayers begin with the words **Almighty God**. There is much in our theology about God's **power and might**. We say God is all powerful, all seeing, all knowing, all loving, all encompassing. To pray to the Almighty God is to acknowledge God's limitless power. To call God almighty is to **accentuate** the role of God as the **active founder** and **administrator** of all that is. Almighty God is the one who actively fulfills the work of creation by exercising providence and engaging in the work of redeeming the world.

Personally, I find great comfort believing that God knows me, knows what I need, watches over me and provides protection for me. I remember in grade school, even after Supreme Court outlawed school prayer, my third grade teacher would lead us in singing: “**He' got the whole world in his hands**”

I remember having the Old Testament stories of God's mighty power read to me by my mother. My favorite story was when Pharaoh's warriors had Moses and the Israelites trapped up against the Red Sea. It looked hopeless. But then Almighty God came to the rescue and divided the water. After the Israelites passed safely across, then Almighty God smote the evil Egyptian killers. It reinforced the old adage, **“God is in his heavens--all is right with the world.”**

At about the age of 13 I started to sense some **logical inconsistencies** with the idea of an all-powerful and all knowing and all righteous God. I had questions like: If God is so powerful, why does he not see to it that his world is run somewhat more benevolently? A similar question today would be: Why does God allow crazed terrorists to fly aircraft into buildings to kill indiscriminately?

There is a famous challenge to God's power and God's benevolence by novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* famously points to the brutal killing of children and protests that he refuses to believe in any God who arranged the world in such a way that it allows the suffering of even one innocent child. Karamazov **“rages against the explanation”** that has traditionally been used to explain suffering, which is, that in God's longer view of history there might be some **“meaning”** attached to the suffering of innocents because it plays out later in a **“happy ending.”**

Some tragedies grip our hearts and our attention by their appearance on the cover of the paper or on the TV screen. Other tragedies are more personal. A family member has a terminal illness. A marriage ends. A child gets in trouble with the law. These personal and private tragedies are the common experience of all of us. It has been suggested that if all the people who are facing tragedy and related problems stayed home on Sunday morning the church would be nearly empty! One of the reasons we come to worship is because we feel the BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER has been knocked out from under us—and we need others to help us get a handle on it.

Almighty God's power is expressed by those who know him and help care for the world and its people. **God's greatest act of love and care was in sending Jesus Christ.** In Christ and in those who have followed his example we see God's love. A charismatic few can inspire many to make a difference.

A friend of mine leads annual mission trips of adults to Haiti. She told me that one night as the group sat under the trees, someone asked all the participants the simple question: **“HOW DID YOU GET HERE?”** She didn't mean, how did you manage to be on this mission venture? She wanted to know how did God work in your life to get you to Haiti?

People told stories.

Someone's husband had died after a brief illness. Life as she knew it was taken from her and she had to start over.

Somebody else came out of curiosity. She was impressed with the impact an earlier trip had had on a co-worker. She came the next year and each year after that.

One had wandered away from the church in his youth---got knocked around a little—fought in a war, built a business, but came back to the church in middle age and just knew that God had drawn him to live among the poor in Haiti!

At the end of the evening, my colleague could only say: What a remarkable and relentless reach does our God possess!

There are three things about the way almighty God works that teaches believers **how to view what happens in the world.**

**1. God works long term, allowing events to take their course.**

He didn't create puppets and he did not expect robotic results. God gave us wonderful freedom and created people in his image. Since human beings are full of creativity and passion, sometimes evil rises out of that chemistry. So God allows things to take their course, not because he cannot do anything else, but because that is the nature of the created order.

**2. God never allows evil to run out of control.**

It is true that evil can become entrenched in whole nations for a time—we saw it in Germany last century. Evil can become embodied by vicious, ruthless, and power driven groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan. There is a rogue form of Islam creating fanatical and morally blind killing that is dominating the headlines. But the way of these **systems is doomed**.

If you are stuck in the midst of suffering—like the poor people in Afghanistan---you find yourself railing like the laments in the Psalms: HOW LONG, O LORD? But evil is vanquished before it dominates the world. But God never allows evil to run out of control!

The current issue of the Smithsonian magazine had an article about warfare. The writer made the assertion, and presented compelling facts, that war is far less frequent today than it ever was, and dramatically so since 1991. War between major nations has become obsolete.

TV reports emphasize war AND THE SUFFERING IT CAUSES—BUT THEY are rarely balanced with stories about the overwhelming majority of the earth's population not being harmed.

For centuries in New Guinea, 1/4 of the population died of violence around endless tribal conflicts. 1/5<sup>th</sup> of Germany's population died in the Thirty Years War in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and 1/3 perished during WWII alone. "*Swords are truly being beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.*"

The challenge facing us now is that technology has made "**hatred more lethal.**" Technology now makes it possible for clusters of intensely hateful people to cause thousands of deaths without using the political or military machine of a state.

***God never allows evil to run out of control.***

The problem is that the **effects of evil are over-reported** and our **human perspective** is very limited!

3. It is in the cross of Jesus where we see the power, the wisdom, and the mercy of God in action. There evil, indeed the greatest evil that would destroy goodness and love, is faced and overcome, and its doom is assured. We see in the cross, the method that God uses to work for good. God refuses to use the weapons of the enemy.

Dr. James Moore tells a story in his book called "*9/11: What a difference a Day Makes.*" A young man named Paul was a student intern at a church when the youth minister abruptly resigned and he was asked to take over. Since the church had an active summer program with a huge group of high school kids, and were desperate for his help, he agreed to do it.

A week later Paul found himself with thirty Senior High youths whitewater rafting on the Ochoee River in Tennessee—one of the most exciting whitewater rivers in the country. How many of you have been Whitewater Rafting? The problem was: Paul didn't know how to swim, and he didn't like to get cold, both of which were inevitable on a raft trip. To make matters worse, one of the guides on their large

raft was a guy who called himself “FUZZ,” a college student who had been a guide for less than a week.

The trip started as Paul expected. He fell three times in the first 5 miles and got pulled back in. Then, just as they were entering a huge class 4 rapid called “HELL'S HOLE”—Fuzz stood up in the back of the raft and jumped overboard!

The raft careened down the river out of control, then it flipped over, dumping everyone into the raging water. The other two rafts came to the rescue and pulled Paul and his group of teenagers to safety.

**Fuzz** then came floating down the river and worked his way over to the riverbank.

Paul angrily confronted him, “What in the world were you thinking?”

Fuzz excitedly replied, “You don't get it man! That's where the VORTEX IS!”

He explained that the rock formation at that spot on the river created a tornado-like current underwater, but the middle of the vortex was absolutely calm . . . like the eye of a hurricane. Fuzz had floated calmly to the bottom of the river while the rapids churned all around him . . . capsizing the raft and tormenting the riders.

Fuzz looked at Paul--”*It is so amazing—It's so peaceful down there. There's turbulence all around you, but there in the vortex, it's so calm and peaceful and serene.*”

Some people live their lives looking for the vortex—the place that's quiet and peaceful and that allows them to avoid the turbulence of life at all costs, even, as in Fuzz's case, if it means deserting the people they are responsible for. Some look for the vortex in drugs, extra-marital affairs, buying more and more things, or constantly seeking new thrills.

The image of whitewater is an apt one to describe the Christian life today. On the surface the river of life seems turbulent and frightening. When it rages, it appears that there is no calm in the center of the whitewater. But as the scripture says, almighty God is in the midst of the river. God is solid, unmoved. God has given us the Church of Jesus Christ as the raft through the turbulence. We are to stay on the boat—trusting God to guide us through to safety. If you stick with it, you can learn to trust God to deliver you safely at the end of the rapids.

God lets evil take its course, but only to a degree.

God answers evil with Good, hatred with love.

In sum, this is the power that shapes the love of the one who died even for those who sought to put him to death.