

# *Wading River Congregational Church*

## SERMONS IN PRINT

PETER J. VIBERT, PASTOR

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Hebrews 1:1-3

"I Believe"

*"I believe in God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*  
What does that mean?

1) *I Believe in God*

To believe is a multi-step action, not very different from knowing, and no less certain. To know or believe, we first make an intellectual assent to some truth. We then acknowledge the consequences of those truths. Finally we entrust ourselves to the life-changing effects of these truths.

So I believe the sun will rise tomorrow, not because I can prove that to you, any more than I can prove that all history and all our memories are not illusions; but I believe because I have assented to the truths of gravity and the geometry of the solar system and the rotation of the earth; I have acknowledged that these facts impact my waking and sleeping, my work and rest; and I have made confident plans for the future based on these facts. I have a calendar that presumes regular sunrises for the next year!

So I also believe in God. I assent to the stories that he exists, that he is personal, that he has spoken to humans, that he is immensely powerful, wise and good. These are truths I assent to but cannot prove. And I know these facts have consequences for me: so for example, his power means he is in control and my plans are subject to his approval. And I further embrace the truth that God is a

person who can be known and I want to know him; so I now entrust myself to him and shape all aspects of my life around my relationship with him.

2) *I Believe in the Father*

I believe in the Father. I accept that he is Creator and Sustainer of all that is. He is the reason there is something rather than nothing. Out of his mind and his power there was a beginning to everything: the "Big Bang" is consistent with the God-revealed idea that space and time and matter began with an explosive burst of energy and light. But God the Creator exists "outside of" or is "not bound by" space and time. In that sense, I am "a Creationist" - like all Christians, all Jews, all Muslims, I believe that "*in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" And from that fact comes the necessity for me of awe and worship.

I believe that God is the author of all life. I believe that life came into being because he created it, though like every other biologist of my generation, including the world's best, I wonder but do not know how he did that. Francis Crick was not joking when he said he doubted we would ever understand the origin of life on earth, and that it might as well have come from space for all we know about its origins.

So I believe we should respect and protect life in all its forms. I am not yet a follower of St., Francis, so I still swat flies and crush bugs, and drown ticks in gasoline. But I believe that the God-given-ness of human life means we should think very long and hard before aborting young humans or euthanizing old ones; or treating embryos as a source of useful cells, or getting too clever with “assisting” human reproduction.

I believe that if God the Father created and sustains all things, then by definition, all I do is subject to his rule and control; and from what I know of his character, that is a source of great comfort and peace. My life and times and family and friends and career and health and wealth and future are in his hands. *“Man proposes, God disposes.”* So be it. I trust him.

### 3) *I Believe in God the Son*

I believe that at a certain point in human history, God appeared as a human, Jesus of Nazareth. He was a Jew of the 1<sup>st</sup> C., one of the chosen “people of God” through whom God was working to reveal himself to the world and to reconcile the world he loved to him. I believe he was the long-promised Messiah of Israel who came to deliver them from slavery to dark forces in the world and inaugurate the Kingdom of God that will never end.

I believe that he taught with authority, understood and treated people as no one had ever done, and taught the best ethics that anyone ever taught before or since. I believe he performed acts of healing that were by any standards miraculous, and gathered around him a nucleus of disciples, men and women, who were drawn from the edges of Jewish society and were utterly devoted to him because he so clearly cared so much for them.

I believe he was opposed by the leaders of his day, both Jewish and Roman, and was unjustly and cruelly executed, as were many so-called “subversives.” I believe that on the third day he was alive again and met many of his old friends, and hundreds of others over a period of weeks. I believe that his “rising” was quickly interpreted by them as a victory over death and evil that had deep implications for all of them, and that they soon cast his story in terms of atonement for sin and defeat of death; benefits that were available to anyone anywhere who “believed in him.”

I believe that his “rising” so transformed his followers that within a generation they carried this story all around the Mediterranean and gave rise to a movement within Judaism they called “the Church,” which soon was so full of non-Jews who embraced the “good news” that it became a separate movement called Christianity. I believe all these events are historically verifiable, as much as any other event of the 1<sup>st</sup> C., and that the “good news” spread rapidly over Europe and parts of Asia and Africa and is still spreading today.

I believe that to embrace the good news today, to “believe in Jesus,” makes us aware of his living presence, and of his power, his grace, his love; and that life as his disciple is more fulfilling and more truly human than any other way. I believe Jesus has inspired more acts of kindness, healing, education, art, music, literature, poetry, science, justice, emancipation, deliverance, freedom, service, sacrifice than can possibly be accounted for other than by saying “this is a work of God.” It has changed my life, and that of about 2 billion other people alive today.

### 4) *I Believe in the God the Holy Spirit*

I believe that the Holy Spirit was sent to empower the Church’s mission to the world;

that he is, as Jesus said, as invisible as the wind but the effects of his work are evident everywhere.

I believe he is the living presence of God in the world today, that he teaches us to recognize God and his acts, teaches us about Jesus, and acts as a Counselor to us individually and as a community. The Spirit's wisdom guides us, his power protects us, and his gifts enable us to do what we could not otherwise do. I believe he works for the most part quietly and internally, and that all good thoughts and all good deeds and all truth can be traced back to his influence.

I believe that in the process of remaking people to be what God intends, he draws them into spiritual communities where they learn to live harmoniously with one another. I believe the Church of Jesus Christ, unlike any other human institution, is directed and preserved by the Holy Spirit, despite the human folly and eruptions of evil that could destroy it.

I believe the Holy Spirit creates faith, hope, love, joy, peace in the lives of people and of communities, and gives them great assurance of God's ongoing concern and care for them. I believe that to be part of a Christian community, a local church, is a great privilege and that it places us in the most rewarding and supportive association of people you can find in this world. I believe the Church is worthy of our devotion and protection and service. I believe that to only live on the edge of it, as many of us have done at times in our lives, is to miss the essence of it as a community - not an institution.

All this I believe, not because I am smart, or have figured out the benefits of belief, but out of a conviction that God has called my name, and called me into relationship with

him, and called me into his community, through Jesus Christ and by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

So I am convinced that nothing in life is more worthwhile than belief in God, that it touches every part of who I am, and that it is worthy of my best service, in whatever way pleases him. I have concluded that C.S. Lewis was right in saying that if Christianity's claims are true, it is worth everything - it is the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price - but if it is not true, then it is worth nothing... *"The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important."*

We are called to *"believe in God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* I commend belief to you, whatever your age, your past experience, your hopes for the future, or your fears about tomorrow. May the Lord show himself to you and grant you the gift of faith in him. Let us pray...