

I believe in God, Father Almighty

I wonder if you realise how amazing and wonderful you are. There are 2 trillion galaxies in the universe and every galaxy contains 100 billion stars. One of those stars, the sun, has one planet in its orbit, our fragile earth, where the conditions were exactly right for life.

Life began on this perfect planet 3.7 billion years ago. Human beings emerged just 300,000 years ago. As far as we know, we are the only part of the universe able to know and understand and think about the cosmos and its meaning.

So you are an amazing part of the story of life. You can think and remember and appreciate the beauty around you. You can love and show kindness. You can tell right from wrong. You have hidden depths that even you don't understand. You are absolutely unique: there has never been and never will be anybody else just like you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Welcome to this short series of films. I'm Steven, the Bishop of Oxford. I'll be 64 in a few weeks, which makes me want to hum a certain Beatles' tune. I'm from Halifax. I'm married to Ann. We have four children and six beautiful grandchildren. It's very good to share this journey with you.

As far back as I can remember, I've been blessed to have a deep faith in God, the maker of the heavens and the earth. My faith has evolved and changed across the years. But that faith has been for me a strong core, an anchor, a source of great comfort and hope, even in difficult times.

I've never been able to make sense of the view that this beautiful, ordered, vast universe came about purely by chance and accident without rhyme or reason. Everywhere I look in the creation there are patterns from the swirl of a galaxy to the shell of a snail. Who put them there?

What was there before the big bang, before time itself? Who created matter and shaped the seas and mountains? Where did the trees come from, and the dragonflies, the beauty of the frost, the taste of a lemon or a spider's web? Who put the laws of physics in place and gravity which holds us to the earth? Who called the first life into being and saw that life emerge and grow, becoming ever more complex until humankind was born?

Who created the ecology of the earth: the balance of the species, the depths of the oceans teeming with life, the deserts the jungles, the elephants, the pterodactyls, the ladybirds?

And who created humankind, women and men in all our wonderful variety but with our common humanity: different races; different cultures, different stages of our lives? Who made the vast caverns of human memory? Who made the imagination able to picture distant places? Who created us able to love and appreciate beauty? Who put within us this deep sense of what is right and fair, what is good and bad, what is kind and unkind?

Who gave us the ability to create and to make things, from a child's painting to a symphony? Who gave us a thirst for meaning? The need to know and understand what we are created for, our need for purpose, to know that our lives matter? And where did the darkness come from? Not the darkness when night falls, which is part of the natural world. The other darkness that we see all around us: the hate and cruelty and injustice in the world, and the darkness that we see within us: the bad things we do and say and think. The good we do not do. How do we understand those feelings of guilt and shame which shape so much of our lives?

When Christians gather, in normal times, Sunday by Sunday, in person or virtually, we come back to the very centre of our faith. Whatever has happened in the week, we place our faith and trust again in God. We say the creed together. When someone comes to be baptised, they make the same solemn, public declaration of faith: I believe.

The creed unfolds the great story and the very centre of our Christian faith. This is the story which gives our lives meaning and purpose and holds us in God's love and helps everything else make sense.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

We place our trust in God as the Almighty, the maker of all. But did you notice something else? Right there in the first line of the creed: we place our trust in God *the Father*. Jesus teaches us to call God our Father in heaven.

God is more than our maker. God makes us to know him and to love him and to live our lives in relationship with him. In the very centre of God's nature is love. All across the universe, God's great love calls us and calls us home: deep calling to deep.

Without God, our hearts are restless, storm-tossed, comfortless. Our lives lack purpose and meaning. We don't know what to do with the darkness in ourselves or in the world. We don't know how to travel home.

Jesus tells a story about a father who has two sons. One of them asks for his share of the inheritance, leaves home and spends the money on wild living. Then his funds run out. There's a famine in the land. He has no food and no friends. At last, he comes to his senses and makes the journey home. All he wants is something to eat and to be a servant in his father's house again.

But his father is still looking out for him still every day. And when he sees him, his father runs towards him, embraces him, calls for the best robes and welcomes him back into the family.

I wonder where you are on your journey with God and if you are ready to come home. This is who God is: our maker who knows us, our Father who loves us. The God who calls us and who calls us home.