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The Life of the World to Come

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

I grew up in a Christian tradition that did not use the Nicene Creed. As I came to experience our Anglican tradition, I was fascinated by some of the cadences of this 4th Century AD creed and the powerful faith statements it makes. One of the parts of this Creed that moves me most, and that I find so poetically beautiful in such an ancient document, is at the very end:

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

You could build a life around those words, and so many millions have.

These final words from the creed are so hopeful, and they speak deeply of purpose and meaning. These words come to mean more the longer we live, as we lose people we dearly love, and as we can plainly see the forces of darkness, death, and destruction in our world right before our eyes.

We have experienced the Risen Christ and his defeat of sin, death, Hell, and the grave, and we believe many of our beloved have entered into that new life, and that we will enter, also, with God's grace.

This is the message of Easter and of the Great Fifty Days of the Easter season upon which we have just embarked.

"We look for the resurrection of the dead" sounds active to me, not passive. I can imagine straining to look for signs of new life, much as you might lean way over the tracks to catch any sight of the light of your oncoming train. Are there signs of new life, of renewed hope and purpose, and of strengthening ourselves for the journey before us?

Easter should help us to stand straighter and to strengthen our weaknesses. If God has defeated our oldest enemy, death, we need not cower in its shadow. We should always be trying to let in the light!

That light shines forth in the forgiveness of sins, in abundant life offered and accepted.

The light shines when we welcome a newcomer who is God's beloved child, from whatever part of humanity that person may come.

The light shines as we get out of ourselves, either as individuals or as a congregation, to help someone in need.

The light shines and grows as we stand up for truth and justice, for fairness, and for treating all of God's children with the dignity God has already bestowed upon them and us.

The light shines when we look for beauty in all of its forms, especially when we ascribe the source of that beauty to our Creator.

None of this is to deny the not-yet-vanquished darkness. We know something of darkness, and so does our Christian faith. Ours is not a Pollyanna faith that denies the gritty realities of this world. After all, the Cross was gritty. But as John's Gospel tells us in the Prologue: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Very similarly, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of the power of the light: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only the light can do that."

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Let us lean in, reach out, and stretch wherever and however possible to see and believe the inbreaking of the life of the world to come.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one, holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.