

What Can You See? Part III

Sunday 21 February 2021

Call to Worship

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

Do not let us be put to shame;

Do not let our enemies exult over us.

Show me your ways, O LORD;

Teach me your paths.

Lead us in your truth, and teach us,

for you are the God of our salvation;

for you we wait all day long.

Good and upright is the LORD;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Come, now is the time

Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to give your heart

Come, just as you are to worship

Come, just as you are before your God

Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God

One day every knee will bow

Still the greatest treasure remains for those

Who gladly choose you now

Lord, I lift your name on high

Lord I lift your name on high

Lord I love to sing your praises

I'm so glad you're in my life

I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way

From the earth to the cross my debt to pay

From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord I lift your name on high

Reading Genesis 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of the bright red apples hanging on the trees
Of the beautiful flowers that glow in the garden
Of the lustrous landscapes of life and activity
that ebb and flow all around us

We limp into your presence
Deeply aware of our weaknesses
And so proud of our strengths

God of the Easterly and Northerly
The Southerly and the Westerly
And all the ‘lys’ between
Of the sun and the rain, the warmth and cold
We creep into your presence
Deeply aware of our need for you
And so sure we can go it alone

God of the rivers and lakes
With their bounty of peace and relaxation
Of the seas abundant with life
The oceans replete with fish of every kind
We come to rest in your presence
Deeply aware that you give us life
And confident of your love toward us

We bring our pride and our weaknesses before you, knowing that we are made whole in your presence. As we lift up our eyes to you, may your glory shine around us and gift us peace. In the name of Jesus, who made all things with you, we pray. Amen.

Reflection – What can you see?

Notices and Celebrations

The Peace

Immortal, invisible

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, the great and the small;
Through all life Thou livest, the True Life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory; pure Father of light;
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All praise we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.

Reading Mark 1:9-15

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Temptation of Jesus

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Message What Can You See? Part III

Signs

We see signs all around us. There are road signs and advertising signs, safety signs and instructional signs. Most signs are self-explanatory. Take these for example: Stop sign, washing hands, fire exit (and opposite arrow exit) Some take a little more interpretation. Like these: Children, one way bridge. And then there are the obscure and funny ones like these... Some of these are real warning signs. Others are just for fun. Can you tell the difference?





WARNING
CHILDREN LEFT UNATTENDED WILL BE SOLD TO THE CIRCUS



Signs, the real ones at least, have a clear purpose besides making us laugh. They are there to make us think, to cause us to be aware of our environment, and hopefully to encourage us to modify our behaviour should that be necessary.



Here is a good example of a, 'behaviour modification', sign. It is telling us that if we are going too quickly it is likely that the corner will be uncomfortable at best and straight up impossible at worst. So when we see a sign like this, the chances are we will check our current speed, and should it be

necessary, adjust to something suitable. Now before the speedfreaks among us leap up with comments about accuracy and necessity, the truth is that for many of us, keeping to suggestions like these lead to a smoother, safer driving experience – for both us, and our passengers.

Of course there are other signs that we casually read every day that have no words, or even obvious images. Things like the wind direction and the shape and colour of the clouds can tell us things about the weather heading our way. The state of the soil will tell us about drought conditions. And then there are the people type of signs. Signs like these. Can you decode them?



The Bible is full of signs of different kinds and has regular references to being able to read the signs. In 1 Chronicles 12 we read of the men of Issachar who understood the times and know what Israel should do. In Matthew, Jesus talks about signs, both from God, and from false prophets. We read about the sign of the Son of Man, and of Jesus performing signs. The Pharisees looked for signs and the disciples asked about signs. The people then knew that God communicated through signs of different kinds and looked for them.

So it is no surprise at all that God deliberately set the **rainbow as a sign** in the sky – a reminder that the great flood should never happen again. And that is because God had made a covenant with every living thing on earth. Wait, what? God made a covenant with every living creature. That includes all the animals and the birds. Every! living thing. Let's take a moment to think about that. The sign of the rainbow is to remind God that a covenant existed between God and every living thing. Kind of off the subject, but how arrogant are we to think that God is concerned primarily with humans.

Anyway, back to the sign. God uses signs, in this case a rainbow, as reminders of promises made and kept. So when we see a rainbow, it is a reminder of what once happened, a reminder that it will never happen again, and a reminder not only to us, but to God.

And then the sign in our reading from Mark. Jesus, coming up from being baptised sees heaven torn open and the **Spirit descending on him like a dove**. And a voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am

well pleased.” What a beautiful way for a Father to affirm his son. Makes me kind of wish I could do something like that for my kids.

Of course, God’s singular sign to us is in the person of Jesus. Jesus was born, lived, died, rose again and then ascended into heaven. He was fully, 100% human, and somehow, in a way we don’t understand he was fully, 100% God at the same time. And he came to us as a gift and as a sign. We weren’t looking for him, we weren’t counting on him turning up, we didn’t even know it was a possibility. And yet, because he loved us, even in our ignorance, he came. It’s kind of funny in one sense because it’s like he sneaks up on us, not to leap out at us with an **almighty, ‘BOO!’** No, he sneaks up so as not to frighten us. To surprise us with **love and grace**. There are signs of this incredible love everywhere we care to look. Most of those signs can be explained away if you care to do so. Even life itself is adequately explained through evolution. Yet if you look a little deeper, it’s not about explaining the how of things, it is about asking the why. Why me? Why this? And God says, ‘Read the signs. What can you see?’ Then with little effort we can see that all the signs point to a simple message from God, through Jesus. **‘I Love You.’**

We Pray

God of signs and images, as we think about what we see around us that points to you we are humbled and amazed that you would make the effort to connect with us, to come to us and surprise us with your grace. We confess that we have not been too good at seeing the signs. Even when we do see them, we like to misinterpret them to make ourselves seem more important than we really are. Help us to learn to see the most wonderful sign of all in the person of Jesus. Help us to interpret the sign of Jesus as you have intended. Help us to be constantly surprised by your love and your grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

When the music fades

When the music fades, all is stripped away,

And I simply come

Longing just to bring, something that's of worth

That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song

For a song in itself is not what You have required

You search much deeper within, through the way things appear

You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
And it's all about You, all about You Jesus
I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You, all about You Jesus

King of endless worth
No one could express how much You deserve
Though I'm weak and poor
All I have is Yours, every single breath

Offering

Righteous God, we mark these early days in the Lenten journey with reminders of your covenant with your people. In your judgement, you sent upon creation the great flood – yet you saved a faithful remnant. You followed with a covenant not to use the flood again. As we prepare to offer our gifts to you, we are reminded that we have been spared from judgment by the one, your son, our Saviour, who took on our guilt and bore our judgement. May gratitude for his sacrifice move us to offer not only money, but our whole being. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

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O Lord, all the world belongs to you,
and you are always making all things new,
what is wrong, you forgive
and the new life you give,
is what's turning the world upside down.

(from a hymn by Patrick Appleford)*

Thank you for the signs that life is still there, emerging and changing: for the dahlias brightening many a Kiwi garden; and for the smallest reptile in the world found, still surviving, in Madagascar.

Yet, that reminds us of the need to care for all our environment; we pray about the people who trade in, steal, kill, collect the rarest and the most important. As experts investigate a probably poisoning of endangered Andean condors, in Bolivia, we pray for understanding of the remarkable interdependence we have with our world. Similarly, for the area of the Tapovan Dam, Uttarakhand state, India, where 170 people are still missing following the dam collapse caused by a glacier burst. The United States is experiencing its worst avalanche season and related deaths in a 100 years and this pattern is repeating

elsewhere in so many aspects of nature. We give thanks for the multiplicity of often small-scale ventures trying to stabilise and reverse this trend of climate warming affecting all our weather systems and therefore life for us all.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

As the news from the WHO report is that the pandemic is unlikely to be caused by a virus escape from a lab in Wuhan, China, we pray that Governments pause to reflect then act on the findings.

We pray for:

- the people of Tanzania as their Government shows how to make smoothies to protect from Covid-19.
- for the people of Ghana whose Parliament will be closed for 3 weeks following a virus outbreak.
- for the fake news from anti-vaccinators focussing on ethnic and minority groups in so many countries including sadly even by missionaries to tribes in São Francisco reservation in the state of Amazonas, Brazil.

With so few countries able to sequence and identify new strains we pray for the scientists now faced with the new, possibly annual, struggle to update vaccines.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

- As we hear of one child and her mother, from El Salvador, held for over 500 days in an immigration centre in the US, we recognise that if this happens once it happens again and again. So we pray for justice.
- for the Amazon workers fighting to found a union in Bessemer, Alabama, USA, we pray for justice
- for the creative artists in the music industry, we pray for justice as Universal, the world's biggest music label seeks to expand even further.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

So much biodiversity, Lord, that it's easier to stick with fake news – for what is human-made can be understood by people. We thank you that in your mercy you hear our prayers.

We pause for a moment to offer our prayers for those we know and love.

Grant us the ability to be your answers for each other.

Amen

[The Lord's Prayer](#)

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

It came upon a midnight clear

It came upon a midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains,
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.

Benediction and Grace

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.