

# Not So Obvious

Sunday 07 March 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 19*

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

**Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.**

There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;

**yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.**

The decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;  
In keeping them there is great reward.

**Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts  
be acceptable to you,  
O LORD, our rock and our redeemer.**

## Lift high the cross

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim  
till all the world adore his sacred name.

Come, Christians, follow where the Master trod,  
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,  
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

Each newborn servant of the Crucified  
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,  
your death has brought us life eternally.

So shall our song of triumph ever be:  
praise to the Crucified for victory!

**Reading**            1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*Christ the Power and Wisdom of God*

<sup>18</sup> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,  
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession – Colin Harvey

Almighty gracious God,

You hold all things together, Lord, let the details in life grab our attention today, the chance just to gather and worship together here, this morning. The sunlight on the trees and the delight of the clouds drifting by Birds sweeping high. O Lord Let the ordinary reveal its amazing delight The sunset that transforms day into night. May these things inspire us to praise you always. We see how amazing the world truly is as we are surrounded with Your goodness and mercy.

From the smallest seed to the largest tree,

From each microscopic species to the fiercest sharks,

From the depths of the oceans to the great expanse of the universe.

Thank you for the beauty around us,

Thank you for the complexity of life within us,

Thank you for breath, for growth, for renewal,

Help us to notice and value these rich blessings in our lives.

You sustain the whole earth, bringing food and nourishment from the soil.

You have showered the land with streams of water.

You have warmed our lives with the heat of the sun

And blessed our dwellings with comfort.

Thank you for all this abundant, incredible beauty and intricate life O God, who on the first day made light, and whose Spirit fills the world, allow each of us, to receive some of Your light so that we can see our sinfulness with clarity. Shine Your divine light on our neglects, offenses, abuses, and all manner of darkness that has displaced Your grace in our heart. Let us hate what You hate, let us rejoice in what You find delightful, so as to become more like You.

Give us the bravery to be honest, to hide nothing, but to confess fully, and clearly, Lord Jesus Christ You astonished those around You by saying “Your sins are forgiven.”

You have paid the price for the sins of each of us.

You have laid out a path straight into your heart.

God, you have invited us to call you Abba Father.

Thank you.

Amen.

### Reflection – a reading...

The heavens are telling the glory of God;

and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech,

and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words;

their voice is not heard;

yet their voice goes out through all the earth,

and their words to the end of the world.

What word or phrase stands out to you?

What might God be saying to you?

What are you going to do in response?

### Notices and Celebrations

#### The Peace

#### God of wonders

Lord of all creation

Of water, earth, and sky

The heavens are Your tabernacle

Glory to the Lord on High

God of wonders beyond our galaxy

You are holy, holy

The universe declares Your majesty

You are holy, holy

Lord of heaven and earth

Lord of heaven and earth

Early in the morning  
I will celebrate the light  
And as I stumble through the darkness  
I will call Your name by night  
  
Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and earth

Reading            John 2:13-22

*Jesus Cleanses the Temple*

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

<sup>23</sup> When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Message            Not so obvious

Sometimes things just aren't what they seem. We look and we think we see, but really, we have missed things, assumed things, and often get it completely wrong. You may remember the TV advertisements for the army a few years back. They showed a short video clip and then asked if you could remember some part of the video. I couldn't find those advertisements, but I figured I could come up with something similar. Here's a quick and easy test. I'm going to show you some pictures for a few seconds and then ask you some questions about them. We will have a practice run first, just to get used to it.

Here are the questions.

How many taps are there? 2

What is the Tui perched on? Flax flowers  
That was easy, right?

**This is our next image...you don't have long!**

Now before I ask the questions, I want to show you **another image**. This is a picture drawn by the Dutch artist M C Escher. Now here's a thought for you. Which way is up?

**Back to our questions.**

What were the two animals in the image? Cat, dog

How many holes in the brick? 3

What make was the crayon? Crayola

Where were the pictures of the apple? Top row on right; Bottom row, second column

What was in the bottom right corner? CPU

So how much did you see? And how much didn't you see? Who found it difficult to remember with the distraction in between? Well done if you got all of those correct. How do you think you would go if we doubled the number of items? Added in more things you couldn't identify? All of a sudden it becomes much more difficult and so much harder to identify what you are looking at. If we add movement it gets harder still.

What seemed obvious in the beginning is now somewhat less obvious.

Here's another example of the not so obvious. I have a strip of paper – normal, everyday paper. It has two sides. Let's mark one so that we can tell the difference. Now I am going to Sellotape the ends together. As you can see I've put a bit of twist in it. But I want to show you something curious. This two sided piece of paper only has one side...let me prove it. I'll put a pencil on the surface and start drawing, without lifting up. As you can see, I've come back to where I started without lifting the pencil. Only one side! What do you think will happen if I cut it in half down its length? Still a single strip but longer. I bet that wasn't obvious when I started.

It is truly amazing how our eyes and our brains team up to trick us into all believing all sorts of strange things.

So is it any wonder that Paul is able to write in our reading from 1 Corinthians that the cross is **foolishness to those who are** perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God? It is as plain as the nose on your face...is that really your nose? that what we think we know and what we really know

are often two different things. There is a rather good saying that goes, nobody knows what they don't know. And the problem faced by those who profess to wisdom is that with all their great learning and expertise they still don't know what they don't know.

Now I am sure, in fact I know, that there are some very smart people in this room. It may be smart of the kind that does university degrees and does white collar work. It may be smart of the kind that can read the land and the animals and know just what is needed to make things work well together. It may be smart of the kind that knows how to raise children or to cook or create art or look after the sick. There are all kinds of smart in this world. And God comes along and says, 'Sorry, none of it is any good. None of your smarts, whatever kind they happen to be, are any good for showing you how to be saved.'

There is not one person who by dint of their smarts can find their way into God's presence. It's like an endless **maze that doesn't have an endpoint**. You can certainly begin the journey, but there is no way to get out of the maze under your own steam.

Of course, down through the years there have been endless criticisms and challenges to this. One of the earliest was a group of people who came to be called Gnostics. They claimed that you could find your way to God via secret knowledge that only the Gnostics possessed. In some ways their modern counterpart could be some of the apologists who claim that they can prove that God exists and that everything the Bible says is perfectly accurate and true.

Then on the other side of the coin are those who claim they can prove that religion is an ancient con. They can prove, so they say, that God doesn't exist – this in the face of the impossibility of proving a negative. Or they say that if some kind of god does exist then everything about that deity is clearly amoral or immoral because the deity doesn't do what they think it should.

All of these people, both for and against are highly intelligent. They have spent their lives relying on their ability to discover new ideas, to stretch out old ideas and to create new possibilities.

Then God says to all of us. 'Sorry. None of that will get you where you want to go. Your great learning, your carefully honed skills, none of it will help you find me. This is a maze you cannot get through on your own. At which point those of us who feel that maybe they don't really rate on the scale of wisdom might

think they are coming into their own. (I would challenge you on that because I believe we all come with our own particular wisdom, even the least of us. I can tell you stories of people we would consider simple who have solved dilemmas with their unexpected insights.) Unfortunately, even the insights of the simple can't help us here.

We can see this in the way both the Pharisees and the disciples completely misunderstood Jesus' claim that he would raise the temple in three days. 'What? We've been building this temple for 46 years and you are saying that if it were destroyed then you would rebuild it in 3 days?' They completely miss the point. Because they are so focussed on their way of thinking they miss God's foolishness. They don't realise that the real temple is that summit of God's creation, the human being. In the first instance, Jesus, and then all those who follow in Jesus' footsteps. Those foolish, weak human beings were the real temple all along. The massively impressive Temple that Herod built there in Jerusalem was an empty monument to a God who chooses to dwell in people.

The Pharisees were demanding signs from Jesus. The Greeks wanted philosophical proof. God offered Godself, as a human being and was humiliated, tortured, and killed. It made no sense to anyone. Even the disciples thought they had been duped. They had hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel and now he was dead.<sup>1</sup> The problem was that none of this was obvious. None of it fitted with what people had expected. Peter, along with the other disciples and the Pharisees, was searching for a Messiah who would make the nation of Israel great again. The philosophers wanted proof that they could argue out of existence with their own perceived wisdom. And in Jesus, God offered neither. Just Christ crucified. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. There is no sense in that. There is no logic in it. There does not even seem to be any obvious profit in it. Yet there it is. Against logic, against profit, we believe. The maze without an endpoint is turned upside down or inside out. Or maybe it goes from being 2 dimensional to 3 dimensional with the 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension being the Holy Spirit calling us into relationship. For those who are called Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Can it be explained in human terms? Not at all. We can't even explain how Jesus could be fully human and fully God. We can't explain the idea of the Trinity – one God in three persons – nobody knows how to put that

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:21

into words. Best of all, we can't explain the why of it. Why would God even care? Yet, as best we can tell, God is. And God cares. And God makes us whole through Jesus. There's another thing we can't explain. At least it keeps the academics employed and out of our hair 😊.

So, in the end, none of it is obvious. Which doesn't matter because it is even if it's not so obvious. Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, in us and through us, to the glory of God.

### We Pray

Loving God, we confess that we don't get it. Smart or not so smart, quick or slow, none of us understands the how or the why. We might say we do, but you are so much more than we can comprehend. Even what we claim to understand is foolishness in the face of your wisdom. Grant us the ability to believe in the face of our unbelief. We are foolish and slow of heart and still you call to us. Open our eyes, Lord, that we might see you in your glory. Amen.

### Open the eyes of my heart

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord

Open the eyes of my heart

I want to see You

I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up

Shining in the light of Your glory

Pour out Your power and love

As we sing holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy

We cry holy, holy, holy

You are holy, holy, holy

I want to see you

### Offering

God of holiness and grace, we know the words of your commandments. In our hearts, we know that following them makes life easier, not harder; fuller, not more restricted. We know there is no God greater than you, yet we have made the silliest things our gods and have thrown our money and resources after them. As we offer our gifts this day, we are reminded that only you have given the gift of a saviour and the redemption of our rebellious lives. In Christ's name, we trust and pray. Amen.

## Prayer for Ourselves and Others – Catherine Harvey

Oh Loving One,

As we come before you today, we're very aware that we are inclined to put our wants and needs before the wants and needs of others. We are so blessed with where we live and the freedom we have to go where we'd like to go and freedom to do what we'd like to do. We have plenty of food to eat and fresh air to breathe.

Please help us not to become complacent and self-satisfied. We pray that we will be more aware of the needs of others and less critical of the circumstances that have led to the difficulties that they find themselves in.

We lift to you those who are living in crowded houses in Auckland or those who have no home at all. Those folk who emigrated to our country because they wanted a better life for their families but are now finding that work is hard to find, housing is either too expensive or not available and the culture is so different from what they have grown up with, that they can't understand it or fit in it. We pray for more understanding on our part of the differences between their culture and ours and a willingness to walk along side them rather than criticise how they are reacting to the situation they're in. We pray that they will have the access to services that they require to become more conversant with our language and our expectations of what we consider the correct behaviour, so that they too may be able to feel at home in this country.

This last week we have coped with another lock down situation and have heard many negative comments on what has led to the lock down. Forgive us Lord when we have joined in the negativity and help us to be more conscience that we don't know the full story or the possible reasons for why those who made what we see as, poor decisions. We pray for those folk in Auckland who broke the rules. We pray that they have learnt the necessity of obeying the rules but also that they're able to forgive themselves for doing so and won't make the same mistake again. We pray too that those who are blaming and shaming them will show more compassion.

We remember the old proverb that "Let is not criticise my brother until I have walked a mile in his moccasins".

We lift to you the family members who have lost loved ones over the last few weeks, through suicide. Especially the small children whose mothers were suffering from post-natal depression. We pray that they will grow up with love

and forgiveness in their hearts for the mothers who bore them and we pray for comfort and strength for the other family members. We pray also that more recognition of the condition, acceptance of its reality and help will be provided.

<sup>1</sup> Looking beyond our shores, Lord, we pray for the people of Myanmar who are fighting for democracy and are being imprisoned and/or are being killed for protesting against a corrupt coup. We pray that through pressure from other countries, as well as from within Myanmar itself, that the matter will be resolved sooner rather than later, and peace and prosperity will return again to that country.

Lord, as we read of the escalation of nuclear capability happening in some regimes throughout the world, we do pray for an understanding of the worldwide destruction that would come in a nuclear confrontation and pray that leaders of the different nations develop healthy communication lines with each other and be more prepared to discuss rather than destroy.

Lord God, we are so blessed and yet so wanting. As we join together to pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, please help the words of the prayers to become very real to us so that truly we mean every word.

Let us join together in the Lord's Prayer.

### 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

### Praise my soul

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;

to his feet your tribute bring.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
evermore his praises sing.

Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour  
to his people in distress.

Praise him, still the same as ever,  
slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;  
well our feeble frame he knows.  
In his hand he gently bears us,  
rescues us from all our foes.  
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;  
you behold him face to face.  
Sun and moon, bow down before him,  
dwellers all in time and space.  
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!

### [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.