

# Missing Piece 2

Sunday 21 November 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 93*

The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty;  
the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength.  
**He has established the world; it shall never be moved;**  
**your throne is established from of old;**  
**you are from everlasting.**

The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
the floods have lifted up their voice;  
the floods lift up their roaring.  
**More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,**  
**more majestic than the waves of the sea,**  
**majestic on high is the LORD!**

Your decrees are very sure;  
**Holiness befits your house,**  
**O LORD, forevermore.**

## Morning has broken

Morning has broken like the first morning  
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird  
Praise for the singing  
Praise for the morning  
Praise for them springing fresh from the world

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven  
Like the first dewfall on the first grass  
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden  
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass

Mine is the sunlight  
Mine is the morning  
Born of the one light Eden saw play  
Praise with elation, praise ev'ry morning  
God's recreation of the new day

Morning has broken like the first morning  
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird  
Praise for the singing

Praise for the morning  
Praise for them springing fresh from the world

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*Rev. Dr. Marilyn Pagán-Banks: <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/11/10/wednesday-prayer-270/>*

I see you in the fallen leaves, the vivid colours  
I see you in the shadows, their soft embrace  
Even in the textured ground, you are there  
Forgive me for not seeing you in my neighbour  
Forgive me for not acknowledging you in me  
Forgive me, God of grace  
If granted tomorrow, may I love more freely and fully

We bring our private confessions before the Lord...

Know that God pardons all who truly repent  
And strengthens us through the Holy Spirit  
In Jesus Christ our Redeemer.  
Amen and amen.

### Reflection

### Notices

### The Peace

### Everything that has breath

He is our God  
Let all creation bow  
The sovereign King most holy one  
He sacrificed His life  
Washed and cleansed within  
Portioned by faith  
We're destined to win

Everything that has breath praise the Lord  
Everything that's in me praise the Lord  
I can praise Him on the highest mountain  
Praise Him in the lowest valley  
Everything that's in me praise the Lord

## Reading

### Mark 10:17-31

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

## Message

### Missing Piece 2

As we ponder your word this morning we ask, God, that you would open our ears and our hearts to what your Spirit would say to us today. Amen.

Does anyone here know the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything? It is, of course, 42, the answer given by the computer Deep Thought after 7.5 million years of calculation. It is a bit of an insiders joke if you have read the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams. There is an entire subgroup of people who, if asked for the meaning of life will immediately answer with, ‘42.’ When challenged on the Answer Deep Thought replies that to understand the answer you need to know the question. I find myself wondering if it is this confusion over what people want and why they want it that leads to much of the shock and perplexity in our reading today.

Jesus tells the rich young man that he lacks one thing. I can well imagine the young man's ears pricking up and him thinking, to paraphrase the words of Edmund Hillary, "Finally, I'm going to knock the 'B...' off." In a way it almost seems like a bit of a bucket list. Let's see, I have \$100 billion. I own an electric car company. I own a space company. What's next on my list of to-dos? I'm poking at Elon Musk because he's an easy target, but you can see similar thinking going on wherever there is plenty of money. "Right, I have solved the issues of making money. Maybe I had better attend to my future self. I wonder what it will cost to get to heaven?"

Then Jesus goes on to highlight the need to deal with that wealth. And not just some of it. We're not talking becoming a socialite philanthropist, lauded far and wide for giving to the arts and whatever issues of the moment will keep you in the spotlight. No. This is everything. Every last, little bit. Gone. There's no coming back from this. At least, not as far as this particular hoard is concerned. It's no wonder the young man is shocked and grieved. This goes beyond life changing. It is going to require a total change in perspective, a complete rewrite of how to live. His friends and relationships will change, his ability to do just about everything he is familiar with will be gone.

Now, here's the thing. The young man came with a question that he didn't truly understand. We don't know exactly how he came to ask the question of Jesus, but it is clear it has been nagging at him for quite some time. It is possible, indeed likely, it is a question that has been echoed among the people he spends time with. Perhaps in the Synagogue or Temple depending on where he worships. It may be an intellectual exercise with some of his educated friends. Or it might be that he looked up at the stars and wondered. But however he came by the question, it is clear that he has spent little time pondering the implications of the question, let alone the implications of any answer.

I would suggest for the most part, we are very similar to the young man, and to the disciples in that we have spent little time thinking about the whys and hows of eternal life. Exactly what is eternal life? What does it mean to enter the kingdom of God? Why is it so hard to enter the kingdom of God? We read the story, we nod sagely then press on to the next story before we get bogged down in the details. After all, you don't need to know the principles of the combustion engine to drive a car. Why would you need to know the principles of eternal life in order to receive it?

I suspect that some of this is because we are wired to filter out much of what goes on around us. A little like someone who lives beside the railroad and barely notices the trains rumbling by. They have learnt to filter those sounds out. We have learnt to filter out anything that doesn't seem to directly impinge on our health, safety and general direction in life. It takes effort, often significant effort to step out of our daily way of life and think about how we are and why we are. It is why most of us default to letting the minister do the theology during the week and regurgitate it in easily swallowed lumps on Sunday. The looks I get should I be silly enough to suggest doing theology together are often not far short of death threats. Theology is your job and would you kindly keep it well hidden from our daily lives. I say this with a sense of humour and a level of sadness.

The young man, in coming to Jesus with his question, had become aware that something was trying to get through his filter. He couldn't identify that something and decided to get some help. The problem he faced was that identifying what was wrong then required a decision to be made. For a successful business leader such as himself he likely assumed that it would be simple to decide once he had a solution in front of him. What he didn't take into account was that the solution would be so intimately connected to how he understood himself as a person. His entire self-identity had been built around being successful, being wealthy. Every choice he had made to this point revolved around this perception of success. The solution Jesus offered required giving up that very thing that defined his self-understanding. It's a little like suddenly realising the train that has passed by every day for the last 20 years is really, really loud.

This is partly why the disciples were perplexed and astounded at Jesus' answer. They are suddenly hearing the train roaring past them as well. They get that this is not just about having money. Riches come in many forms – yes, rich with money, but how about rich in family, rich in friends, rich in experience, rich in talent... you get the picture. Their question, 'Then who can be saved?' tells us they see this is so much bigger than some rich guy wanting to get into heaven. And so we come to the real point of what Jesus is talking about.

You Can't Do It.

You do not have the resources needed to enter eternal life.

It is impossible for mortals to enter eternal life under their own steam.

In my imagination I can see the disciples standing there with their mouths hanging open like fish suddenly out of water. The train hasn't just passed by, it has hit them head on. Up until now everything they have been doing with Jesus has really been something of a game. Say, 'Yes,' to Jesus, follow him around, if everything turns to custard we can always go back to what we were doing before. In fact, that is exactly what they did after Jesus was crucified. Where did Jesus find them? Out fishing, back doing what they had always done. But Jesus is saying they have to give that up and give it up in such a way that short of God's intervention there is no going back.

The truth is that with very few exceptions we can't do that. It's not that we don't understand the idea, or even want to follow up on it. It's that we have neither the strength, nor the courage to follow through. That is not a condemnation, merely an observation. We simply don't have it within ourselves to follow through on what God is calling us into. We will try. We will fail, we will try. In some cases we keep on trying with great faithfulness. And we keep on failing. Whatever our wealth happens to be will keep getting in the way. Even if we find the courage to give up our wealth it will only be a matter of time before we find something or someone or somewhere else to place our trust.

But here's the thing...God gets it.

God gets us.

God knows us.

God loves us even in our inability to enter the kingdom of our own accord.

Now I know that there are plenty of people who happily say, it's OK, God's got this. While it is true, I think it often misses the astonishment of the disciples. They understand the extremity of what Jesus is saying. It doesn't matter if camels are passing through small gates or the literal eye of a needle. They have been faced with the fact that unless God intervenes, they are not getting eternal life. Unless God intervenes, we are not getting eternal life.

OK, point made, so what?

Here is what I think we need to take away from this.

We spend a large part of our lives filtering God out. It is like we know there is a missing piece to life and as long as it's not too obvious we're happy to keep it that way. We like who we are and how we do things, for the most part at least.

Letting God in gets in the way of all that. It means that when God gently whispers to us, encouraging us to grow a little, become a little more like Jesus we are just as likely to ignore those whispers, or talk louder to drown them out. It means that we begin to think that our way of doing things is better, that we are in control of our lives. We don't murder or steal or commit adultery and we think that we are OK. "I'm a good person, I'm going to heaven." And so, we filter God out. The sense of something missing is buried beneath all the things we like doing and being.

I want to ask you this morning, "Are you OK with filtering God out?" If so, I think that's OK. You are still loved. If you are not OK with filtering God out, then ask yourself, "What are you going to do about it?"

### We Pray

God, rich in mercy, full of grace, abounding in love. We come to you in so very many states. Filled with hope, expectation, fear, concern, indifference. We long for you to intervene in our lives and we are afraid that you will intervene in our lives. We search for answers and simultaneously dread those answers. You know our hearts. Come to us today as we have need and reveal yourself to us out of and beyond our filters. Let us see you. 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

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

God of majesty and power, you have dominion over all the universe, and yet you chose to rule not in power but in love. The gifts we give to you are not

given from fear or in petition for your favour, but in the deepest gratitude for all your blessings that keep us and sustain us. May our whole lives reflect to the world that there is one who rules us with love and compassion, above all this world's nations and principalities. In the name of your Son, the Christ, we pray. Amen.

### Prayer for Ourselves and Others

*Julie Gvillo: <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/11/14/sunday-prayer-labor-pains/>*

Sovereign God,  
in the midst of chaos, you are calm;  
in the centre of unrest, you are peace.  
Quiet our spirits  
and focus our attention  
when the pain feels too great  
and we cannot catch our breath.

Be present, we pray,  
with those who are suffering  
through conflict  
and crisis,  
those who have lost  
their sense of direction  
along with everything they own,  
and those who follow  
without understanding what is taught.  
Shine your light into the darkness.  
Birth new hope in places of grief and pain.

Spirit of Wisdom,  
breathe empathy into hearts.  
Teach us how to dismantle systems of injustice  
in the world,  
but also in your church,  
and to be the church in the world,  
facilitating the process  
that leads to new life  
in the appropriate time.



## 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.

## Love Divine

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down:  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast;  
let us all in thee inherit,  
let us find the promised rest:  
take away the love of sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith, as its Beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be:  
let us see thy great salvation

perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
'til in heaven we take our place,  
'til we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

### Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may that sense of something missing stay with each of us and cause us to press more deeply into the God who loves us through our insufficiency.

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.