

It's Not Fair

27 March 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 32

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"

and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;

you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,

and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

What a friend we have in Jesus

Joseph Medlicott Scriven

What a friend we have in Jesus,

all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry

everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged;

take it to the Lord in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful

who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness;

take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,

cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Saviour, still our refuge--

take it to the Lord in prayer!

Do your friends despise, forsake you?

Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In his arms he'll take and shield you;

you will find a solace there.

Prayer of adoration and confession

Earth

Brown, musty, crumbling

Alive with microbes, worms, bugs, plants

Ready, waiting to give new life to seeds

Seeds springing to life

Bringing hope and a future

God

Hidden, unknowable, strong

Giving life where there is none

Hope where it has been lost

Strength where there is only weakness

We acknowledge our sin to you

Confess our transgressions to the Lord

Knowing you forgive the guilt of our sin

As your faithful people we pray to You

Our hiding place

Let us be glad in You

And shout for joy

In our salvation

Amen

Notices

All services and study groups on pause until the 4th of March. We will update everyone on the 5th as to whether we are meeting again from the 10th. The plan is to do so, but as we all know, things change.

The Peace

Reading 1

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my

sheep that was lost.’⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Reflection 1

It’s not fair! How often have we heard our kids or our friends or our siblings say it’s not fair? On the sports field, around the birthday cake, under the Christmas tree. Kids who have no concept of legal framework will tell you something is not fair without any prompting at all. It’s like we are hard wired to know when something is fair or reasonable. Not only that, we fight back if we think we are being treated unfairly.

It's not fair – she got more cake than I did! I want more. Now!

Hey ref – that’s not fair, they came up offside.

It’s not fair – all their players are bigger than us.

It’s not fair, why should I have to have a vaccine pass to go to the café?

Just because he’s older than me he gets to go to the movies on his own! That’s not fair.

Come on, tell me you’ve never complained about something not being fair. We do it all the time. Sometimes it’s obvious that what we are complaining about is unfair and we have to go with responses like, ‘That’s just how it is.’ Other times the sense of fairness is largely made up to go with how we are feeling at the time. Then occasionally we see something happening that causes our fairadar to go off the chart.

Usually it is because someone is getting treatment that we think they don’t deserve. Like a celebrity or business person getting a light or no sentence for a crime when ‘normal’ people would get much stronger punishment. We huff and we puff because it is not fair. Why are they getting away with it when we wouldn’t?

It is just this kind of huffing and puffing that the Pharisees and scribes are engaging in here. We have been good. We do all the right things. It’s not fair that he focusses on them and not us. We are the important people here. We work hard, we go to church every Sunday, we pay our tithes and help with the working bees. Then Jesus rocks up and spends all his time with those people who can’t be bothered getting out of bed for church because they spent all Saturday on the booze. There’s a strong sense of being hard done by and not getting what we think we deserve.

Then Jesus kicks in with the parable – ‘I’m concerned with all my sheep, but when one is in trouble, of course I go and help it. And I’m excited when everything turns out well.’

Let me give you a little bit of an example. It has a very sad aspect to it, but I think it illustrates the point rather well. The fishing boat, ‘Enchanter’, that capsized on Monday. Do you think the families of the people on the boat were standing around asking why they didn’t get a ride in the helicopter? Of course not – they were asking everyone to put all their resources into finding the lost fishermen. The sad fact is that five of the ten people didn’t make it back alive. My point is that everyone’s focus and energy went into finding them and it wasn’t until they were all accounted for that the focus shifted to the ones still on shore. Nobody would argue that this wasn’t fair. It had nothing to do with fairness and everything to do with who needed saving.

And that is where the Pharisees straight up missed the point. Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them because they were the ones who needed saving. People sitting safe in their chairs at church could quite reasonably be expected to look after themselves. They weren’t in danger of injury or death in the same way as those Jesus was spending time with.

It does rather beg a question of how we might be a little more like Jesus in terms of where our focus sits. Are we concerned about whether God is treating us, ‘fairly?’ Or are we earnestly praying and working toward finding the sheep that are lost? Not saying it has to be our only focus, but maybe it should take up some of our thinking.

Salvation belongs to our God

Pat Turner

Salvation belongs to our God
Who sits upon the throne
And unto the Lamb
Praise and glory
Wisdom and thanks
Honour and power and strength

Be to our God forever and ever
Be to our God forever and ever
Be to our God forever and ever, amen

And we the redeemed shall be strong
In purpose and unity
Declaring aloud
Praise and glory
Wisdom and thanks
Honour and power and strength

Reading 2 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Reflection 2

We could look at our first reading as a generalised introduction to the reading we have here. If Jesus' parable was designed as a gentle prod to think about our expectations and role as Christians, here Paul is far more direct.

As a starting point, we now know Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. We can no longer simply look on and say that he was a good person or a very wise person. That option is no longer available to us. Yes, he was both good and wise. And he was more. God incarnate, God made flesh, come to live among us. We won't get into the details here, but no regular human being who is good and wise would have acted in the way Jesus acted. Only the Son of God would or could do and say what he did and said. But that's only the introduction. The next is where it gets really interesting.

So. In other words, directly because of what we have just seen. Because we know that Jesus is God, we know that what is to follow is true.

If ANYONE is in Christ, there is a new creation. There is no prevarication here, no ifs, buts or maybes. Anyone! Think back to the shepherd. Was the lost sheep, 'in Christ?' Absolutely. They may have wandered off and got lost. They may not be doing what the rest of the flock is doing. Yet they are still one of

flock, they are still one of Jesus' sheep. We're not finished, but that alone bears thinking about.

Right, anyone in Christ is a NEW creation. That's not, 'good as new.' It's not, 'good condition, second hand.' It is NEW. I wonder if sometimes we lose sight of the implications of this sentence. It rolls off the tongue easily enough, 'I'm a new creation.' It has a nice ring to it. But do we believe it? Am I really new? I don't feel new. I sure don't look new. I definitely have that second hand look in the morning. I think this is one reason we tend to skip over this verse a little. Let's not think about it too deeply because the words don't seem to match up with my lived experience. How I feel and look is very different to what I am reading here. Oh, there may have been a time when everything was exciting and fresh and the idea of being a NEW creation seemed rather wonderful. Then life crowded in again and what had been shiny and fresh dulled and frayed.

Two things I want to home in on here. One. The NEW creation is not a one off, now you're done, off you go to get scuffed and mused. The NEW is a dynamic, always ongoing, constantly refreshed state. It seems to me that we humans tend to think that God does something once, then moves on to more interesting things. That would be like a child who is given a doll to play with, who feeds it once then puts it on the shelf and never touches it again. Or one of those creepy porcelain dolls that no-one is ever allowed to touch. I don't think that is how God works. God is constantly at work renewing us (should we allow it to happen), drawing us toward being more like Jesus every day. New? Yes, every day.

Two. This NEW requires buy-in on our part. We can choose to be scuffed and mused, like an old pair of shoes. We don't have to let God renew us. And sadly, I suspect that is where many of us sit, comfortable in our old shoe status, unwilling to go through the work of constant renewal. It's difficult to lay my old habits and expectations aside. It's hard to pick up the ministry of reconciliation that renewal anticipates. Being an ambassador for Christ is tough.

I sometimes find myself wondering if it is actually easier for Jesus to go out and get the lost sheep than it is to hang around with the rest of the flock. Maybe that's why there is so much rejoicing going on when the lost sheep is found. It means he can go out and start looking for the next one. I joke, but do I? Really?

We Pray

Loving Saviour. We are all lost at some point in our lives, often more than that. You have come to find us and bring us home. Somehow we can find that being home feels like harder work than being lost. Forgive us for our constant leaning away from your love. Teach us to lean into you. To discover what it means to be constantly made new. Enable us to be your ambassadors without fear and without pulling away. Strengthen us to become the righteousness of God in You. Amen.

In Christ alone

Stuart Townend

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;

From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Offering

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

Long-suffering God, we hear the words of the parable and are reminded of our selfishness. We have received—or demanded—blessings to which we were not entitled and failed to see that in Christ everyone is a new creation. We have also looked out from our place of superiority and favour and have been indignant over your lavish dispensing of love and mercy. As we bring our gifts this day, we do so in the humble gratitude and recognition that any and all blessings in our life come as your gift of grace. We pray in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus our redeemer. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

God our motherly Father, our brotherly Saviour, our sisterly Spirit-Friend, we ask that in our prayers and in the ordinary affairs of each day, we may exhibit your generous spirit to other people.

We pray for the millions of homeless people whom we will never meet but whose predicament we see on the news. People struggling across borders, across oceans and mountains in search of safety and security.

Please bless those humanitarian agencies who attempt to care for them, and all who give generously to support their work.

We pray for unwanted or destitute people in our own country, from Cape Reinga to Chatham Island.

Please give both wisdom and a generous spirit to the national and local governments, and strengthen the welfare ministry of churches.

We pray for any among us here today, who with dignity and courage are secretly enduring misfortunes or ongoing worries.

Please give your peace and healing to them, and keep us sensitive, that we may recognise a cry for help if it comes our way and respond generously.

We pray for neighbours or workmates, and for those familiar but nameless faces we notice each day in shops, along the street or in supermarkets.

Please bless each according to their need, and without any prying or self-importance on our part, make us ready to help in the hour of need.

We pray for all the bewildered, lost souls; for young folk hitting out, puzzled adults who find that neither career nor family satisfy their deepest need, sour elderly folk who are jealous of the faith and happiness of others.

Please gather the lost into your loving arms, and help each of us to treat awkward, prickly people with the generous respect that you have for each.

Loving Saviour, seeking the lost and the unlovely,
we worship you.

Caring Spirit, enabling the weak and the meek,
we worship you.

Holy God, generous beyond all calculation,
we worship you.

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

Saviour while my heart is tender

C W Burton, John Burton

Saviour, while my heart is tender,
I would yield that heart to thee;
All my powers to thee surrender,
Thine and only thine to be.
Take me now, Lord Jesus, take me,
Let my youthful heart be thine;
Thy devoted servant make me,
Fill my soul with love divine.

Send me, Lord, where thou will send me,
Only do thou guide my way;
May thy grace through life attend me,
Gladly then shall I obey.
Let me do thy will, or bear it,
I would know no will but thine;
Shouldst thou take my life, or spare it,
I that life to thee resign.

May this solemn consecration
Never once forgotten be;
Let it know no alteration,
Registered, confirmed by thee.
Thine I am, O Lord, for ever,
To thy service set apart;
Suffer me to leave thee never,
Seal thine image on my heart.

[Benediction and Grace](#)

As we go on from here may we be a people constantly being renewed, created in Christ to be ambassadors of God's love for everyone we meet.

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.