

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Hard

31 July 2022

Call to Worship

Thank you, God, for the sun, even when it is hidden behind the clouds. It makes me feel...

My response

Even though the world can seem chaotic I want to say to you, God...

My response

I will tell the world all about you, I will say...

My response

Let all creation sing

Paul Zach, Andy Zipf

Let all creation sing before the Lord
and every nation of the earth rejoice,
let all the trees lift a shout of joy
for the Lord is King.

Let the deep waters of the sea resound,
let every mountain, every hill sing out,
let all the fields make a joyful sound
for the Lord is King.

Mighty river, barren desert,
howling wind and stormy weather,
every canyon every valley,
sing your praise and give him glory.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

Every star and constellation,
every wonder in the heavens,
silver moon and supernova,
sing a shining hallelujah!
Honey bees and weeping willows,
grizzly bears and armadillos,
every narwhal and sea otter,
every son and every daughter.

La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord
La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God, you are...

Thank you for...

God, I am...

God, I am sorry for...

Psalm 32

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be—
you get a fresh start,
your slate's wiped clean.

Count yourself lucky—

**GOD holds nothing against you
and you're holding nothing back from him.**

When I kept it all inside,
my bones turned to powder,
my words became daylong groans.

**The pressure never let up;
all the juices of my life dried up.**

Then I let it all out;

**I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to GOD."
Suddenly the pressure was gone—
my guilt dissolved,
my sin disappeared.**

Notices

The Peace

Reading 1 Psalm 61:1-5

- ¹ Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
- ² From the end of the earth I call to you,
when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I;

- ³ for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.

- ⁴ Let me abide in your tent forever,
find refuge under the shelter of your wings. *Selah*
- ⁵ For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Reflection 1

Creating is hard.

I don't mean that creating is difficult or complex or requires work. I mean that creating demands something of us that often does not come easily. When we create something we invest ourselves in what we are creating, whether that is a smile or an ocean liner. I have been thinking about how sometimes I have to manufacture a smile that doesn't feel quite real. It can seem real enough to a stranger, but to anyone who knows me they will see the effort it has taken to produce. It's not that I don't mean any of what is represented by that smile, it is that making that smile and giving it to someone else has required more than I can easily give. The investment I have made in that smile has taken more than I have to spare in that moment and it is hard to see it go. That might seem strange to some, those who find they are made stronger by the presence of others around them. For them, the giving of a smile makes connection and gifts energy to both the smiler and the smilee. For those more like me the smile drains a little of our energy. When we have an abundance that is fine, but when we are running on empty it can drag us down and wear us even thinner than how we began. I think it is the same for any kind of creating. When our energy is at a low ebb it is harder to create because creating uses up energy. It is why God rested after six days. It is why we need to rest regularly.

In case you are still wondering what on earth I am talking about, perhaps to think about it this way. Think of the thing you most enjoy doing. Now think about how it is to do that thing when you are wrung out and exhausted. Or perhaps how it is to do that thing when you are broken-hearted and hurting. When it is an effort to lift your head, let alone get busy at some task or purpose. Even that thing you most enjoy doing becomes a drain on your energy. It drags at your soul and weighs you down. In other words, that thing you most enjoy becomes hard.

I suspect it may have been how the Psalmist was feeling in Psalm 61. From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. God, I am struggling here. I have been torn down and crushed. I have nothing left but to call out to you. Help me, God.

Now, I know that every one of us has felt that at some point in our lives. Every one of us has felt like we just don't have anything left for whatever it is that will come next. All we can do in that moment is call out and say, 'Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.' Let's pause with that for a moment. We all, each one of us, come to that point where what is in front of us is hard to imagine getting past. How does that feel? How do we respond?

...

Now, this may seem like an odd jump, but I want to put it in the context of us being co-creators with God. You see, I think that God has experienced this kind of hard, just as we do. I will come to the obvious example in a moment. First, think about this, after six days of creation God rested. What if God rested because creation was hard work and even God needed some time out. As human beings we are easily tempted to make God into this being that suffers nothing of our human frailties. There are verses like Psalm 121:4 "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." Job 37:16 talks of God as the one who is perfect in knowledge. Psalm 139 implies that God sees everything in every place. Yet Jesus, God as human, displays none of these supra-human traits. He sleeps, he eats, he presumably goes to the toilet. A human being in the image of God, doing all these less than supernatural things. Is it possible to imagine a God who rests, not as some grand symbolic gesture, but because rest is necessary?

If that is the case, and I realise I may be stretching some people's limits here, but if that is the case, then maybe the reason I can call to God when my heart is faint is because God genuinely gets it. Like a parent comforting a child at the loss of a family pet. The parent is grieving just as the child is grieving, but for that very reason is the strong tower against the enemy. We can shelter in God's wings because God is right there with us and knows what we are experiencing with an intimacy that only a parent, deeply engaged with their child can ever know.

Perhaps we are not alone in finding that creating is hard.

[Song](#)

Reading 2

Revelation 21:1-5a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

Reflection 2

Creating is hard.

I think part of the reason creating is hard is because we are not very good at seeing where it is all taking us. There's that old complaint about God that asks why God created a world in which pain and death exist. How can God be good when there are some many people dying in wars and from starvation and with incurable diseases?

It is a perfectly valid question and one for which Christians down through the centuries have struggled to find answers. The problem is that the question is something of a misdirection. It is like watching the All Blacks lose to the Irish and asking why they wear black jerseys. It is another perfectly valid question that has nothing to do with what actually happened in the match. Or like watching a cake collapse in the middle and wondering why the baking powder came in a red packet.

I'm sure we can all easily think of more useful questions to ask of the All Blacks, or even the cake. What then, is the more useful question to ask of God? My suggestion would be that the more useful question is to ask, 'How do I get to know you, God?' How would that be the better question? It is because there is a difference between talking about what we think just happened and what actually happened. A difference between talking about someone and talking with them. Even a difference between talking at someone and talking with them. The difference comes in that little, most underrated word, listening.

Rather than gifting the world with our opinions on what God is doing or not doing depending on our perspective, we could go for the radical alternative of sitting at God's feet and listening.

Let me give an example of the difference between the two things. I begin with a question: What is heaven like? If you are like most people brought up in the 20th/21st century church you will likely have some version of singing angels and clouds and streets of gold with a benevolent God beaming down on all the wonderful people singing his praises. So where do we get that idea from? It finds its origins in Greek thought, in particular Plato and has no relationship to Hebrew or even early Christian thought at all. Look at what Revelation 21:3 tells us: the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them.

God brings heaven down to us. We mortals, note that word, mortal, dwell with God where we are. To be honest, I have no idea how we can be mortal and see that death will be no more, but let's not go there right now – we can talk about that little conundrum later. This is where we see the difference between talking about and talking with. Plato didn't talk with God. Plato talked about his concept of God and what that might look like. Hence the up in the sky, singing with the angels nonsense. God longs to talk with us, to walk with us in the garden just like we did so long ago. So the best way to do that is to bring back the garden to where we are. God will make all things new.

In the meantime we are at work as God's co-creators, labouring to help prepare the foundation for God's return. It's not going to make everything perfect and easy, but seeing something of the end goal can give some perspective to the hard we face in the meantime. I wonder, along with probably everyone else, why it all has to take so long and why there is so much pain and suffering along the way. I can see in the midst of it all that if I focus on my relationship with God then all that I am doing becomes wrapped in God's presence. I am engaging in the hard with a co-creator who is right there with me, experiencing my pain along with me. So I can keep creating, secure in the knowledge that the one who is making all things new is making with me. Not in spite of me or against me, but with me.

Maybe creating being hard is a good thing after all. What do you think?

We Pray

The rock, higher than any of us. Our strong tower. Our refuge. Our comforter. Thank you that sometimes life is good. It seems easy and straightforward. Yet sometimes it feels hard. The call to create with you even seems too hard at times. We look at all that is going on around us and are tempted to throw our hands in the air and say, 'I can't.' In those moments you are closer than we can ever know, dwelling with us in a foretaste of what is to come. Gift us, we pray, with the courage to cry into your arms, to rest in your tent and then turn and face the hard again, knowing that we are never alone. In the precious love of Christ we pray. Amen.

Song

Offering

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

Holy God, loving parent; your patience with your children is beyond our comprehension! How many times have we sung praises to you “from whom all blessings flow” and yet in our lives, in our practice and in our giving, we’ve acted like most of those blessings are from our own – to do with as we wish? Often, we have been deaf to your teaching and blind to your leading. May the gifts we give today be a token to our goal to live generous lives that honour you and express gratitude for your goodness to us. In the name of Jesus, our saviour, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the world around us

- War and famine and disease
- Poverty and powerlessness
- Government and social services

For ourselves

- The people of the Cross
- Family and friends
- Ourselves

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

Song

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.

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All creatures of our God and King
All hail the power
All things bright and beautiful
Amazing Grace (My chains are gone)
Amazing love
Be thou my vision
Beneath the Southern Cross
Bless the Lord (10 000 Reasons)
Blessed Assurance
Blessed be your name
Celebrate Jesus
Come, now is the time
Crown him with many crowns
Do something beautiful
Everything that has breath
Glory be to God the Father
God of wonders
God you spin the whirling planets
Great is thy faithfulness
Guide me O thou great Redeemer
Holy, holy, holy
How great is our God
I serve a risen Saviour
Immortal, invisible
In Christ alone
Indescribable
It is well with my soul
Jesus, name above all names
Jesus, we enthrone you
Joy to the world
Let all creation sing
Let the weak say I am strong
Lord, I lift your name
Love divine
Morning has broken
O for a thousand tongues
O worship the king

Open the eyes of my heart
Praise to the Lord
Rejoice the Lord is King
Salvation belongs to our God
Shine, Jesus, shine
Shout to the Lord
The church's one foundation
To God be the glory
Way Maker
What a beautiful name
What a friend we have in Jesus
When the music fades
When we walk with the Lord