

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Making Choices*

*07 August 2022*

### Call to Worship – Psalm 33

Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,

**The people whom he has chosen as his heritage.**

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,

on those who hope in his steadfast love,

**Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield.**

Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

**Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,**

**even as we hope in you.**

### 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

*Clare Lind*

Loving God, we give you thanks for the ways you are present  
In the world around us and within us.  
When the structures of our lives  
Have become shaky for one reason or another,  
And we have to leave behind  
Cherished and familiar places and activities and things,  
You are with us wherever we are.  
You are our roof and walls, our shelter and protection.  
We thank you for your comfort and your love.

God, our Saviour, for the times when you have brought us in  
When things might have overwhelmed us,  
For your care when we have needed space  
To regain perspective and to reconnect with you  
And with those who ground us,  
We give you thanks and praise.

We thank you too, for those occasions  
When you have been our doorway out into things  
We never dreamed of getting into,  
When your Spirit has nudged us into things  
That have forced us to grow and to lean on you.  
Thanks for the things you have shown us,  
For the joy you have shared with us,  
For the wisdom you have taught us.  
Thanks for the wideness of your world and your love.

Because of you we are never alone.  
Because of you we are never without love.  
For these things we give you glory and praise.

And in the silence now we make our prayers and confessions....  
You know, better than we do, what we need.  
Help us to leave these things with you  
Trusting to your grace and mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**In Jesus we are never alone. We are never without love. Thanks be to God.**  
Amen.

## Notices

### The Peace

#### Reading 1 Joshua 24:14-18

<sup>14</sup> “Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; <sup>18</sup> and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

#### Reflection 1

Let’s say I was to offer you some M&Ms. To get them you simply have to choose whether you want the red ones or the green ones. Who would choose the red? And the green? And, yes, I know, some of you don’t care, or don’t like M&Ms. Not the point 😊 .

Now something a little different. Suppose I asked you to come to the front and do a short drama. Again, I know some of you hate the very thought, but play along with me. Here is the scene. A table with 3 chairs. One chair faces the audience, one is side on to the audience, and the other is facing away from the audience. Let’s call them A, B and C. Which chair would you choose to sit in?

And again, suppose you were offered the opportunity to take an all expenses paid holiday with as many members of your family as you would like to take.

You get to choose between a luxury apartment in Wanaka and a luxury resort in Vanuatu, time of year is up to you. Which would you choose?

It is fascinating seeing the different choices people make. Of course we are constantly making choices every single day. When to get out of bed, what to wear for the day, what to have for breakfast, what route to take to the supermarket, who to call or visit, whether to watch TV or read a book, what book to read, ... it goes on and on to the point that most of the time we give our choices very little thought. Given the number of choices we have to make in the course of the week, I can imagine it would make one very anxious if we had to dwell on every individual choice, pondering the consequences and possible outcomes of those choices. And thank goodness that we don't have to think about things like breathing and our heart beating – most of the time at least. We would never get anything else done at all.

But what about the choices that are not every day choices? Things like buying a car or a house, starting a business, moving house or town or country. Most of us will weigh our choices carefully, look at the pros and cons, consult with friends and advisors, research the market. We put as much effort as we reasonably can into ensuring that we make the best possible choice. And then it all falls apart on the back of our emotions. We know that very few significant choices in life are made purely on the facts of the situation. We don't buy a car because it is the best possible vehicle for our needs, we buy a car because we like the colour or the 'face' as some people I know would put it. We don't buy a house because it fits exactly the criteria we have set for the perfect house. We buy a house because we walk in and know, 'This is it.' And let's not even begin with relationships!

So it was when Joshua set before the Israelites a choice. Choose whom you will serve. Will it be the gods of your ancestors, or the gods of the Amorites, or the Lord? Let's think about those choices for a moment.

#### *The gods of their ancestors*

The gods of the ancestors would have been a bit like a warm blanket on a cold night. They knew what they were getting and it was comfortable. There was no worrying about what new thing the minister might come up with on Sunday. There were no new songs to learn. It was not too warm, not too cold, it was just right, maybe even lukewarm. You didn't have to think about things or worse, take away homework. You could just keep doing the things that made

you feel nice. And if anyone asked why, you could say, 'Because it's what we've always done.' These gods were perfect for ignoring the rest of the world.

### *The gods of the Amorites*

These were the gods out there who filled the spaces all around the people. They were gods of profit and power and success. They found their way into people's homes through the collection of money and stuff. They could be seen in the cafes and picture theatres, on television and in the newspapers. The only conflict came when you challenged the status quo and suggested that emperor had no clothes, indeed, that perhaps even the emperor was an illusion. These gods were perfect for blending in with the rest of the world.

### *The Lord*

The Lord was the Lord of the wilderness, of wandering, of never being entirely settled. The Lord used selfish pharaohs and unthinking fish to shake people awake. The only safe place to be was with the Lord. It was uncomfortable and challenging and forced you to think about who you were and how you related to everyone around you, to the world, to God.

It's really no wonder Joshua was sceptical at the Israelites saying they would serve the Lord. We didn't get to it in our reading this morning, but Joshua's response to their answer was to tell them, 'You cannot serve the Lord.' He could see that their choice was driven not by the facts, but by the emotion of the moment. For most of those people the facts of the gods of the ancestors or the Amorites were so much easier, more comfortable than following the Lord would ever be. That's why choosing to follow Jesus is never a choice to take lightly or easily. And it's also why we so often lose our way, after all, the other choices can be very appealing.

What do you think?

### *Song*

*Matt Redman*

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

## Reading 2                      Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> Let anyone with ears listen!"

## Reflection 2

I want to ask you a question. Which kind of seed medium are you? Are you the path? Are you the rocky ground? Are you the thorny ground? Or are you the good soil? And what gives you cause to choose that medium as a metaphor for your life? I know...it's a rather confronting question. Everyone wants to be the good soil, myself included. And then we look at our lives and we wonder about the grain – a hundredfold, sixty, thirty. Does that really describe how we have lived? Can we genuinely claim to have lived up to that standard? But then, what might it mean to be one of the others? Would God still love me if I turned out to be thorny ground? Would I still be accepted and loved if the birds ate up all the seeds on my path? Could I even claim to be Christian if I was the rocky ground?

I want to suggest again, much as I did last week, that this is the wrong question. It is a question that sounds like it should be asked. And for most of us, being able to answer it in the way that seems to be the 'correct' way feels right, as if that is what is supposed to happen. But it is a red-herring, perfectly

phrased to make you feel bad but not in any way that you might be able to constructively do anything about it. Instead, you will either stew in your juices, turning it over and over without any productive result, or you will push it to one side and do your best to forget about it.<sup>1</sup> Neither response is what Jesus was likely aiming for when he shared the parable.

Unsaid in all of this is the whole reason Jesus came in the first place. Jesus came to restore relationship between people and God. Jesus knows full well that left to our devices pretty much nobody will end up being good soil. That's the irony of the story he tells. He knows that the sower is, on one level doing a poor job. What good sower is spreading their seed on pathways and thorns and rocky ground? But what if the sower is not only in the business of sowing seed, but they are also in the business of transforming the soil where the seed is sown. Pathways softened and turned over, rocks crushed and fed with fertiliser, thorns cut down and turned into the soil to provide nourishment for the seed. I would say that is the business Jesus is in. Not to constantly invest in the 'easy wins,' but to renew and rebuild the broken and the downcast. To bring new creations into the light and new hope for the hopeless.

If you are anything like me there's a lot of seed that lands and gets eaten and scorched and choked. I need the Holy Spirit, in Christ, to work on me, work in me, to create good, fertile soil where the fruit of the Spirit can spring up and bring hope and life to those around me.

Which brings me, in a very roundabout way to creating is making choices. The truth is that most of us make some good choices, lots of very average choices and quite a few poor choices. A lot of those choices have minimal impact on the way we live out our faith.

Many of our choices make a difference in our world. Choosing to smile at that person on the street. Choosing to write to or call a friend you've not seen in a long time. Visiting someone in hospital or a rest home. Inviting someone home for a meal. Writing or sharing a poem or a song. Building a kennel for a puppy. Cleaning somebody's windows. Chatting over the fence with a neighbour. Any or all of these things, and a multitude beside, can add something good to the

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<sup>1</sup> It's a similar feeling to the question around which gods we might serve, the gods of our ancestors, the gods of the Amorites or the Lord. We want to be able to say the Lord, but there is an uncomfortable squirming when we think how deeply linked in to the other gods we have become. What will God think of me if it turns out that in spite of me *saying* I will serve the Lord I am really serving other gods?

world. And in those moments of choosing to create something good we find that we are becoming good soil, bringing forth grain, either a little or a lot.

The remarkable thing about this is that in becoming good soil we discover that our choice is to follow and serve the Lord. Ever so slowly and often unaware of the transformation we become Joshuas not because it is easy or simply but because it is the best thing we know how to do.

So the question comes back to, 'Choose this day who you will serve.' It's not about how good you are at serving or how successful you will be. Simply, choose. The hard ground, the rocky ground, the weedy ground of our lives will be, slowly but surely, transformed into good soil. Then we will find ourselves co-creating with God. Pretty cool, really.

### We Pray

God of Joshua, we confess that we often don't choose well. We like what we like and don't want anything or anyone to mess up our comfortable choices. Help us to open ourselves to your Spirit working in us to transform the hard pathways, the rocky, uneven soil and the weed infested thickets into fertile soil, ready to take on the seed that will lead to good fruit. In and through Jesus we pray. Amen.

### Way Maker

*Sinach*

You are here, moving in our midst  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, working in this place  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, moving in our midst  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, working in this place  
I worship You, I worship You

You are  
Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper  
Light in the darkness, my God  
That is who You are



You are here, touching every heart  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, healing every heart  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, turning lives around  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, mending every heart  
I worship You, I worship You

You are here, touching every life  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here, meeting every need  
I worship You, I worship You

That is who You are

Even when I don't see it, You're working  
Even when I don't feel it, You're working  
You never stop, You never stop working  
You never stop, You never stop working

## Offering

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

God of love and grace, we bring our offerings this day and ask that they might be dedicated to strengthening your church for the making of disciples for Jesus Christ. Your prophet Isaiah reminds us that offering money or possessions is not enough, that unless our offerings are accompanied by a willingness to “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow,” our offerings are futile. Open our ears to hear what pleases you and open our eyes to see the opportunities all around us. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

*Colin Harvey*

Gracious Heavenly Father, you look with loving compassion on all your creation. We look to the hills to see if our help comes from them. We look to the town to see if our help comes from there. We look to the sea to see if our help comes from the waves. We look to the sky to see if our help comes from there. And always, our help comes from you, our God.

**With thanksgiving, we offer these our prayers. Oh Lord, hear our prayer**

There are so many who have been displaced— in war and in famine, they long to return to their homes. May they be cared for, and may they find kindness on their journeys. Lead them to their safe place, comfort in the shelter of your compassion. May they, too, find their home in you.

**For those who have found themselves where they did not expect to be, Oh Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have experienced loss – of jobs and financial security, or separated from loved ones through bereavement. May they find your love and the light of your promises to be more than enough for the next step. Lead them to a place of hope, to find glimpses of joy in their journey. Bind up their wounds – so tenderly – and fill them again with your goodness and mercy.

**For those who grieve and seek a path forward toward hope, Oh Lord, hear our prayer.**

Bless all those who work with compassion – the overworked, essential services workers, who risk their own health safety providing what is necessary for living. We pray for those who have wandered far from you – who feel forsaken, forgotten, or fearful. May they find that you are not so far off after all. May they trust in your prodigal love and return to your outstretched arms with joy.

**For those who are lost and in need of your welcome, as a prodigal son's father, Oh Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for those of us who are comfortable – safe, healthy and secure. We thank you for your many blessings. May we find creative ways to be a blessing to others as we seek the peace and wellbeing of this town. Fill us with your grace and mercy and love, that we may be healers in your name

**For those in need of what we have to offer, Lord, hear our prayer.**

All these things we bring in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us how to pray...

### [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

## Holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,  
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,  
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee  
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

## Benediction and Grace

As we go out from here may we choose well, allowing the Creator to create  
new life within us and turning our attempts at creating into serving with joy.

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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