

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Responsibility*

*04 September 2022*

### Call to Worship – Psalm 1

Oh, the joys of those who do not  
follow the advice of the wicked,  
or stand around with sinners,  
or join in with mockers.

**But they delight in the law of the LORD,  
meditating on it day and night.**

They are like trees planted along the riverbank,  
bearing fruit each season.

**Their leaves never wither,  
and they prosper in all they do.**

But not the wicked!

They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.

They will be condemned at the time of judgment.

**Sinners will have no place among the godly.  
For the LORD watches over the path of the godly,  
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.**

### O for a thousand tongues

*Charles Wesley*

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God,  
assist me to proclaim,  
to spread thro' all the earth abroad  
the honours of your name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease,  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean;  
his blood availed for me.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

What is the wilderness, God?  
Is it the dry, dusty desert?  
Is it the rain-lashed mountains?  
Is it the rocky river-valley split and scarred by rushing water?

Or is it our hearts?  
Dry from too long away from your presence.  
Split and scarred by life hidden from your gaze.  
Cragged and broken through disappointment and fear.

Come, search for us in our wilderness  
Carry us home in your love and compassion  
Lay us down by still waters  
Heal our wounded souls

We know we are lost through our own failings  
Forgive us for our headlong dash into darkness  
Bring us into your light  
Renew a right spirit within us  
In and through Jesus we pray. Amen.

### Notices

Thinking about how Waitaki Presbyterian Parish can move into the future. All welcome to be a part of this conversation.

Tuesday 6 September, 2pm at Eveline Church.

### The Peace

## Reading

### Malachi 1:11-14 (The Message)

“I am honoured all over the world. And there are people who know how to worship me all over the world, who honour me by bringing their best to me. They’re saying it everywhere: ‘God is greater, this GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies.’ “All except you. Instead of honouring me, you profane me. You profane me when you say, ‘Worship is not important, and what we bring to worship is of no account,’ and when you say, ‘I’m bored—this doesn’t do anything for me.’ You act so superior, sticking your noses in the air—act superior to me, GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies! And when you do offer something to me, it’s a hand-me-down, or broken, or useless. Do you think I’m going to accept it? This is GOD speaking to you!

“A curse on the person who makes a big show of doing something great for me—an expensive sacrifice, say—and then at the last minute brings in something puny and worthless! I’m a great king, GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies, honoured far and wide, and I’ll not put up with it!”

## Reflection

What does it mean to take responsibility? In preparing the message for today I came across all sorts of different definitions. They were really different and ranged from depending on my agency, that is, depending on what I do, to depending on other’s agency or what other people do.

What do I mean by that? Well, on one end of the spectrum we have definitions of responsibility that are based around me doing what I am told to do. Fulfilling my responsibilities could almost be translated as following orders. It means that any practice of responsibility on my part requires me satisfying the needs or requirements of someone else. I have little choice or agency in how or even if I can be considered responsible. We could call it fulfilling my duty. An example of this would be working as a service station attendant. In this definition my responsibility is to look after the needs of customers and keep the forecourt and sales area clean and tidy. Beyond simply following instructions and doing my job I apply little or no agency or choice.

At the other end of the spectrum is a description I particularly like: Being responsible means being dependable, keeping promises and honouring our commitments. This of course can be applied to our service station attendant and take things to a rather different level. In this instance, my agency, my choices are much more important. What I say matters, the choices I make matter, my relationships matter. The attendant, let’s say that’s me, is no

longer simply following instructions. Instead, I am asking the question, 'How can I be the best I can be in this role?' I am looking for ways to care for customers that makes them feel appreciated, I am looking at how I can improve the environment, how I can improve workflow and do a better job.

I do want to take a nod here to a phenomenon that is rather breaking the internet at the moment. It's called quiet quitting. I'm not entirely sure but I think it is similar to working to rule. What it amounts to is doing your job and only that – no staying late to solve a problem, no answering emails in your own time, no taking on extra responsibilities that aren't in your contract – just the job as written and no more. There are lots of people around the world 'quiet quitting' and there are just as many getting mad at the quiet quitters. How dare they do only what they are paid to do and no more. I want to be clear that I am not advocating that being responsible requires you to do more than the job you are paid for. It merely requires that you do your job to the best of your ability.

I think that is why I like this reading from Malachi. It seems to be asking the question, 'Are you doing the job to the best of your ability?' The simple answer God has for the Israelites is, 'No.' The people have gone down the route of the attendant who simply follows instructions to the letter with no regard for offering the best. Their attitude is summed up rather brutally with the words, 'I'm bored – this doesn't do anything for me.' And let's be clear here, this is not about a teenager who hates church because the culture is so far removed from what they experience everywhere else. This is about the 'grown-ups' who are a part of the system, who have likely come to the church with joy and excitement, or grew up in the church and this is what they have always known. But their worship is no longer about a living relationship with God. It is a routine, followed out of habit, begrudged if it wasn't for the friends who feel the same way but come for the same reasons. And so the words are routine and the gifts are given with little grace, kept to the minimum and offered with poor care. These grown-ups apply responsibility without agency, not understanding that without love, without relationship, worship is meaningless. I suspect that few of them were conscious of their thinking, or what had led to it. Which only makes it doubly sad.

I firmly believe we are created to be creators. I also believe that being co-creators with God requires us to take responsibility with agency. For a moment I want to focus on how this applies to our faith. When we worship God out of a

love and desire for relationship with the living God we are actively creating because God inhabits the praises of his people.<sup>1</sup> This means how we worship is important. Do we worship with joy and love? Do we bring everything we are to worship, the good, the bad and the ugly? Do we invest all our energy in seeking the face of God? Do we offer the best of ourselves?

When we do all these things we are creating with responsibility. Not the duty kind, although that is a part of it, but the kind that brings the very best of what we have to offer.

## The Servant King

*Graham Kendrick*

From Heaven, You came helpless babe  
Entered our world, your glory veiled  
Not to be served but to serve  
And give Your life that we might live

This is our God, The Servant King  
He calls us now to follow Him  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to The Servant King

There in the garden of tears  
My heavy load he chose to bear  
His heart with sorrow was torn  
"Yet not My will but Yours", He said

Come see His hands and His feet  
The scars that speak of sacrifice  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered

So let us learn how to serve  
And in our lives enthrone Him  
Each other's needs to prefer  
For it is Christ we're serving

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 22:3

## Reading

### Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## Reflection

You give them something to eat. Hang on a moment, there are nearly 10 000 people here and you want us to feed them. Here? That's crazy!

What happens when responsibility faces impossibility? For the most part I have talked very practically about creating. It's the things that we can do, the things we can achieve with the resources we have that are readily accessible. But not everything is easy and sometimes the task before us can seem straight up impossible. That can be the case in our everyday lives. I want to spend a little time thinking about what happens when God invites us to perform the impossible as an act of co-creating. Let me share an example from my own experience.

At the end of 2008 I was coming to the end of a time where I had three jobs. I was half-time stated supply at one church, and spent the other half of my time as leader of the youth programme at two other churches. Strictly speaking it was two jobs but the youth programmes had exploded and the work required was climbing rapidly. I had two interns working with me, we ran holiday programs and camps, we had large numbers of volunteers and it was full on. I finished the stated supply role at the end of that year and moved to 80% time with the youth work. By now I had grown a sense of call to Brockville and so I offered the other 20% of my time, unpaid to Brockville, to build the ministry

there. As an aside, neither church could properly afford to pay me and my job existed on the back of grants from various organisations, including Synod. Slowly but steadily we built up the work. I say we because although I was the one being paid I certainly wasn't working alone. At the end of 2011 I resigned from the youth leaders role and was inducted as minister at Brockville. We had no money there. In fact, what we were doing, should have been impossible financially. We rarely had more than a few months money in the bank, and I frequently went home from Parish Council meetings wondering if there would be enough money to pay me the following week. And the ministry kept growing. We had a thriving youth ministry with around 40 kids in the Friday afternoon programme and around 30 on Friday nights. We averaged between 80 and 100 people most months at our community dinner and quiz night. People began coming to faith and we were having baptisms in a pool we borrowed from another church. None of this was possible. None of it was realistic. All of it was happening.

Through all this impossibility we could see that our responsibility was to be actively working, creating alongside God. More often than not we couldn't see where things were going. I would try something. Sometimes it would work, sometimes it wouldn't. With a good deal of encouragement from others we took a team of young people to Vanuatu, raising thousands of dollars in the process in a community that had very little money. As I look back on that time I realise that we spent more time on the impossible than the possible. We didn't see it that way because we were so focussed on being where God was, doing what God was doing. Being co-creators with God.

Can I suggest something here. I think that we often miss out on seeing the impossible made possible because we are afraid. Afraid of what might go wrong. Afraid of failure. Most of all, afraid of the responsibility it may entail. We are afraid of the terrible, 'What if?' Preparing this message has left me wondering if perhaps one reason the church is quietly failing is that we have lost the courage to take responsibility and create alongside God.

So, I want to invite you explore what it might mean to take responsibility and create. No, I'm not talking about running youth groups and community meals. That was another place and another time. I'm talking about allowing God to take you out of the possible and into the impossible. Letting Jesus invite you to step out of the boat as it were.

Jesus said to the disciples, 'They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat.' I am 100% certain that if the disciples had stepped out of their possible they would have seen the miracle come about at their own hands instead of merely collecting up the results of Jesus' miracle. That really would have been offering their very best to God. You may look down at your hands and think, 'I am old and slow and I can't do very much.' You may be correct. But your possible isn't what God is looking for. God is looking for people who will step up to the impossible alongside him. I'm going to leave a few moments for you to talk with God about it.

### We Pray

Creator God, you have designed us to be so much more than we often ever achieve. We are often afraid, or unsure and so we offer you less than our best. Forgive us for holding back our best from you. Forgive us for speaking with our lips and not with our hearts. Give us courage to step into the impossible to create with you the best we possibly can. Teach us to take responsibility as your co-creators and to focus on what you are doing rather than what we can't do. Through Jesus, who made the impossible possible in our own lives we pray. Amen.

### Amazing Love

*Billy James Foote*

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken  
I'm accepted, You were condemned  
I am alive and well, Your spirit is within me  
Because You died and rose again

Amazing love, how can it be?  
That You, my King would die for me?  
Amazing love, I know its true  
It's my joy to honour You  
In all I do, I honour You  
  
You are my King



## Offering

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

Holy and righteous God, through your Son, you have called us to follow. The gifts we offer this day are only a small token of affirmation that we accept that call. If we embraced the full meaning of that call, we would give our whole being to the offering. In many cases, we've allowed ourselves to believe that a few dollars and an hour on Sunday is the cost of discipleship. Help us to stop fooling ourselves, and consider the full cost of a discipleship that means something, that is capable of transforming the world. By your grace and with the help of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C46sun17.htm>

There are millions of God's children in dire need, this very day.

We pray for some of them.

God our most holy Friend, we pour out our hearts to you for this world, for all its people with many and changing needs.

We yearn for violence to cease, and for justice and peace to become real in every community.

We desire poverty and homelessness to be abolished and disease to be eradicated,

We feel for all the unemployed and all who work in degrading professions.

We covet a society where the youth are not corrupted, and the elderly not neglected.

We want the resources of the land, sea, and air to be used more prudently, so that our grandchildren, and theirs, may have a good inheritance.

We long for a New Zealand nation that takes a lead rather than mimic the faults of larger and more powerful nations.

Holy friend, especially help each of us to respect and cherish every person, both in the church and in the secular community. Make us flag bearers for your new world of integrity, hope, faith, compassion, and joy.

Through Jesus Christ our Redeemer who taught us 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

## Great is thy faithfulness

*Thomas Obediah Chisholm, William Marion Runyan*

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

## 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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