

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Failing

11 September 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.

**Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.**

Wash me clean from my guilt.

Purify me from my sin.

**For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.**

Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.

**You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.**

But you desire honesty from the womb,
teaching me wisdom even there.

**Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Create in me a clean heart

Keith Green

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Create in me a clean heart, oh God

And renew a right spirit within me

Cast me not away from Thy presence, oh Lord

And take not Thy holy spirit from me

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation

And renew a right spirit within me

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Bethne Dodd

We thank you, Lord Jesus,
for your example of service – of humbly washing your disciple's feet.
More than that, we thank you
for the hard daily work of building relationships and creating community.
For telling stories and asking questions.
For disputing truth and challenging faith.
For confronting prejudice and injustice.
For calling people to account and to action.
For living integrity, showing compassion, restoring hope and bringing healing.
For providing us with ongoing guidance, by gifting us your Holy Spirit,
that we might continue to find the energy and ability to do the same.

We thank you, Creator God,
for the opportunity life offers us to discover our abilities and fulfil our potential
by using those things we have learned to contribute to the wellbeing of others,
as well as ourselves.

We thank you, for the all who are, or have been, examples to us
and for those whose lives and livelihoods continue to impact us for good each
and every day...

Artists, Athletes and Analysts.

Builders and Biologists. Bakers and Business owners.

Carers. Cleaners. Counsellors. Crafters.

Dreamers. Dancers. Drivers. Designers and Directors.

Engineers and Entrepreneurs'. Environmentalists and Enthusiasts.

Friends. Farmers. Family and Whanau.

Givers and Growers.

Helpers and Hand-holders.

Inventors, Inviters, Inspirers and Initiators.

Leaders. Learners. Lovers and Listeners.

Mechanics. Medics. Musicians. Mathematicians.

Nurses. Newcomers. Newsreaders.

Politicians. Police. Planners and Peacemakers.

Physicists and Physicians. Parents and Poets.

Retirees, Refugees and Road-workers.

Star-gazers and Scientists. Secretaries and Statisticians.

Trainees, Tradies and Teachers. Thinkers and Theologians.

Volunteers and Visionaries.

Wardens, Wordsmiths and Wonderers.

Thank you for all creators of community.

Those who choose to work hard, to love, to endure.

Those who are patient, generous, hopeful.

May we too reflect aspects of your loving creative service
in who we are, how we live, and what we do.

And when – as is so often the case –
we lose sight of the difference we can make for the better,
and fail to grasp opportunities to add good into our world,
our communities and neighbourhoods,
forgive us...

(Pause)

Forgive us,
then reassure us of your love shown to us through Jesus Christ,
the One who continually refreshes and recreates all things
in order to make them new.

Amen.

Notices

Thanks to those who were a part of the first conversation thinking about the future. About 30 people attended and I think we made some useful progress.

The Peace

Reading 1 Samuel 11:26-12:7a

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷ When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

Nathan Condemns David

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, **12** ¹ and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for

the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." ⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Reflection

Nobody's perfect, the saying goes. I wonder if there is anyone here who has had the perfect life? Chances are none of us would lay claim to such a preposterous notion. Yet, we use the word to cover all sorts of different things. This length of rope. Perfect for my needs. That amazing cake – perfection. She has a perfect complexion. Of course, none of these things are actually perfect. Perfect means completely free from faults or defects, as good as it is possible to be. I'm pretty sure the rope is not free from all faults and defects. The cake for all that it is amazing could always be that little bit better. And the perfect complexion – that all depends on how close you get and what you're looking for.

The truth is that perfect is an idea of something that doesn't exist in reality. Which is, I have to say, something of a relief, because I don't know about you but failure seems to be an unavoidable part of life. From small things like dropping a pencil or stumbling on a curb or failing an exam, to larger things like broken relationships and lost opportunities. The vast majority of our failures are quickly forgotten. Who can remember the first time they fell while learning to walk as a toddler? Or the pen you dropped on the floor 10 years ago? It tends to only be the more significant failures that remain in our memories. And it is frequently those big failures that determine the course of our lives for years to come, constantly informing our decisions as try to move ahead.

I don't know if you've ever noticed, but the Bible is chock full of mistakes and failures. From Adam and Eve in the garden to Paul and Barnabas fighting over where to go next it is almost like there would be no story without the failures. Some of those failures are worked out in the end, and some of them go with the protagonists to their graves. Think of Aaron and the golden calf, Saul and the impromptu sacrifice, Judas and the 30 coins.

Then we have David and Bathsheba. Now I am not interested in the question of who is to blame for what happened, we can leave that for another conversation. Instead, I want to think about the immediate aftermath because

while mistakes happen, large and small, I think it is our response following failure that measures who and how we are. The prophet Nathan turns up at David's door. I suspect that Nathan arrived in fear and trembling because he was the bearer of dire tidings. He began with telling David a story. It is a story designed to tug at the heart strings. We see the poor man with a much-loved pet, caring for it amid his own need. Against this we have the rich man with more money and sheep than he knew what to do with. Then the traveller arrives and rather than provide hospitality out of his plenty he takes the precious lamb belonging to the poor man.

Now there is a byplay here that we can see at work in our own world. The poor man's lamb was a path out of poverty. Notice that it was a ewe lamb. He would have been able to breed it and in time begin to develop some small wealth of his own. It was more than a pet, it was his future. Now think about how our tax system works here in New Zealand. The poor of this country pay far more tax in proportion to their income than the well-off. It is a modern day example of the rich man taking the poor man's lamb, ensuring the poor man will never get out of his poverty. So as we continue the story, listen for echoes in our own experience.

David, on hearing the story becomes angry. He understands the byplay very clearly. He sees how the rich man has conspired to keep the poor man in poverty. David's response is to say that rich man should die, but failing that should set the poor man up with the opportunity to become more. It is a righteous anger, a well-deserved anger. It is an anger that is fitting for those who treat the poor of our country with such disdain and who begrudge any real help out of their condition. David is not wrong to be angry – it is the appropriate response.

Then the strike to the heart: 'You are that man.' We see as the story continues that there are consequences to David's actions. This is a failure that strikes deep into the human condition. It speaks to wealth versus poverty, power versus weakness. This is a failure of discipline, of judgement, of character. I'm not sure that we very often see this level of failure in a single human being. Sure, it does happen, but most infrequently. But the point isn't that we all reach the depths of depravity, grovelling in the mud at the bottom of the pit. It is that we all, whether we are prepared to admit to it or not, have experienced aspects of deep failure in our lives.

If the story were to end here then woe is us, because it really seems like there is no coming back. David is a lost cause, failure upon failure. Surely he cannot be redeemed. Yet we read, in Acts 13:22 this same David described as a man after God's own heart. Clearly failure, even of the magnitude that David achieved, isn't the end of the story. Why? Because David's instant response is contrition and repentance. His eye is fixed on God. He knew he had failed. He knew it was no small thing. And he knew, even in that moment that he needed to press into God because it is God who lifts us out of failure and creates in us a new way of being, a life as co-creators with him. Charles Wesley put it like this: Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou my God should die for me.

And can it be

Charles Wesley

And can it be that I should gain an int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me?

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

Reading

Matthew 26:69-75

Peter's Denial of Jesus

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." ⁷¹ When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you."

⁷⁴ Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Reflection

Have you ever set out to do something that turned into a flop? Like unsuccessfully try to make a friend, or build a model that just didn't go right, or bake a cake that crashed in the centre. Or maybe you've made a promise to be somewhere at a certain time and completely forgotten – I've don't that more than I like to admit. Perhaps you've let a friend down and not been there for them when they needed you. You likely haven't intended it that way, but that is how it has turned out.

I really feel for Peter. He tries, so very hard. He works hard, I suspect he plays hard. Whatever he finds to do he puts 100% into it. And with constant trying comes constant failure. It has been said that the only way to avoid making a mistake is to do nothing at all. Problem is that doing nothing at all is a mistake all on its own. How many people here have learnt to walk? You've made mistakes on the way to succeeding. How many of you have learnt to speak? You've made mistakes along the way. How about learnt a new language, played an instrument or a sport, done a crossword or the daily sudoku? Now tell me this: Did you start out as a maestro, or did you have to make a mistake or two along the way to competence?

This is where I love Peter. Never once does he let his mistakes stop him from getting up and trying again. Sure, he had his down moments. He denied Jesus, then went out and wept bitterly. He knew what he had done. He saw the

consequences of what he had done in the look on Jesus' face.¹ I have no doubt that everything about that experience churned him up inside. Sorrow, doubt, fear, loss, disappointment, anguish would have gripped his soul and tested his ability to get up and carry on. Even then, he got up and stood at the foot of the cross. He went to the empty tomb. He agonised over what had happened with his friends, and he went fishing. He kept going. Then Jesus came and forgave him and set him on his way again.

Peter, David, and all the other failures in the Bible are laid out before us for a reason. There are some who fail and then fail to acknowledge where they have gone wrong. Then there are those who fail, who see what they have done and how they have failed. They bring that failure to God, then they get back up and keep going. In keeping going they co-create with God, bringing joy and hope into the world alongside their pain. Do they suffer consequences? As best I can tell, every time. Yet, in pressing into God through the pain and failure they find the ability to create, to add good to the world. Read David's psalms. See Peter's bringing of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Creating that has reached down thought the centuries to you and me.

Let me close with this. Don't ever let anyone call you a failure. You will fail, probably most of the time. You may make costly mistakes. You will make many small mistakes. But you are not a failure. David was not a failure. Peter was not a failure. The only failure is to lose sight of the fact that God loves you and longs for your best. So get out there, get creating and get failing, because it is in many failures that we discover the beauty of God at work, in us and through us.

We Pray

God of many failures, of David and Peter and me. Our mistakes are far more abundant than our successes and you love us through all of them. Help us to put aside the fear of failing and learn to create and create and create so that others can see how much you love us and how much you love them. Teach us to press into Jesus in our mistakes, to endure the disappointment of failure, and run the race set out before us, to your glory. Amen.

¹ Luke 22:61

My Chains are Gone

John Newton, Chris Tomlin

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, who called me here below
Will be forever mine
Will be forever mine
You are forever mine

Offering

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

God of relentless love, the Gospel reminds us of the joy you feel when one of your children chooses the path of repentance and redemption. We picture the celebration in your heart when that choice is made. We also know how prone we are to wander off that path as we pursue those things that satisfy ourselves only. Receive the gifts we offer this day as a sign of our striving to get back on the path that leads us to you. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ, the light on our path! Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

As we bring our prayers for the world around us we are conscious that we need prayer just as much as anyone.

War in Ukraine and economic collapse in Sri Lanka

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

King Charles and the royal family following the death of Queen Elizabeth

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Those stuck in emergency housing in our country

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Local body elections

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For ourselves and those we know and love.

For the travellers, the sick, the lonely.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

In and through Jesus who walks with us through our failures and 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

Rejoice, the Lord is King

Charles Wesley

Rejoice, the Lord is King,
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing
And triumph evermore:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.

Jesus, the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love:
When He had purged our stains
He took His seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail;
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n:

Rejoice in Glorious Hope,
Jesus the Judge shall come;
And take his Servants up
To their Eternal Home:

We soon shall hear th' Archangel's Voice,
The Trump of GOD shall sound, Rejoice.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we be mistake ridden and failure filled as we create with abandon to the glory of God.

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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