

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Listening

11 September 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 78

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

**When God cut down the people, they sought for him;
they repented and sought God earnestly.
They remembered that God was their rock,
the Most High God their redeemer.**

But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
Their heart was not steadfast toward him;
they were not true to his covenant.

**Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity,
and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger,
and did not stir up all his wrath.**

Trust and Obey

John H. Sammis

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

But we never can prove
The delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do;
Where He sends, we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Thank you, God, for the lives we have
For the most part we are warm
We get to eat regularly
We have a safe space to sleep
Sometimes we are worried about our finances
But with care we can get by
Thank you that we are safe and secure

Help us to remember those who have none of these things
Who are frequently cold
Who eat when they can and often miss out
Who sleep in cars and tents in the dead of winter
Who have no finances to even begin to worry about
Who are constantly in fear of who might take unwanted interest in them
Who desperately want more for their lives
And can't even imagine how that might happen

We remember that you love them just as much as you love us
We are sorry for the way we frequently treat them as less
Teach us to love them as you love them
Teach us to serve them as Jesus served them
We bring our private confessions before you now

Now that we have let go of the pain, the bitterness, the anger of our lives,
let us be kind, tender-hearted, and gentle towards each other,

forgiving as God has forgiven us.
We are God's beloved children,
and will model God's grace and love in our hearts.
Thanks be to God! We are forgiven! Amen.

Where do you find God?

Notices

Our next future church conversation is going to be on Tuesday 4 October at 2pm. We will do a quick overview where we got to last time and then we are going to begin working on where to from here. Between now and the 4th I would like you to find an article – from the newspaper, or something online – that highlights something that worries or concerns you about what is happening in society. Or it might be something you don't understand. We will use those articles to assist our thinking.

The Peace

Reading

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Reflection

Patch Adams video clip (online)

Hunter, as a 9-year-old, thought that his father's absence was somehow his fault. Then his father tells him that he lost his soul in the Korean War. Hunter is telling a deeply personal story here. Watch how the doctor behaves as he continues.

Although the doctor doesn't seem very interested, we could be persuaded that the doctor was perhaps listening at this point. Maybe he is trying to find the beginning point of Hunter's problems. We soon realise what is happening.

The sense of disinterest and lack of engagement by the doctor is palpable and then Hunter says out loud what we are all thinking. At least my uncle was listening.

All in all a fine example of not listening.

I think we can forget how important listening can be to people. A number of years ago I had a period of about 12 months that caused me to doubt my sanity. A little bit of background. I am not a trained counsellor. To be honest there is not much that frightens me, but the idea of having to do counselling is one of those things. People begin to share something with me and I sit there numbly, listening to every word and with no idea, whatsoever, of how to respond. So, in the course of this 12 months nearly every person who came into my office left in tears. I was bewildered by it. What would happen is that people would come to talk about something, it might be as mundane as dealing with the gardening around the church or as deep as a child lost to miscarriage with every imaginable thing in between. And they would leave in tears, nearly every single time.

I discussed it with my colleagues, with my Parish Council (some of whom had left in tears) and with my supervisor. Eventually we broke it down to this. I had no idea what to say to many of the things people had to say so I had developed a practice of waiting until they had finished and were looking at me expectantly, hoping for some kind of deep wisdom. And I would look them in the eye and say, 'Keep going, you're not finished yet.' Mostly, after a couple of rounds of, 'You're not finished yet,' the tears would begin flowing and they would begin to work out their own solution. Eventually they would leave, thanking me for all my help while I stood there wondering what had just happened.

I realised that the ministry that I had accidentally stumbled onto was that of listening. People didn't need to hear my wisdom, which was good because I had none to offer. They needed someone to listen. I know that some of them had never had anyone listen to them like that in their lives. The fact that my listening verged on a constant sense of panic that I might have to offer some useful piece of advice didn't matter. They were being listened to and that gave them value.

As I have put this message together I have realised that in simply listening I was creating a healing space for each person. God was able to work in those spaces that I wasn't filling with needless words. And in those spaces the Holy Spirit gently drew out the deep needs of that individual in a way that I could never have managed. Then the Spirit ministered healing and wholeness, as deep calls to deep, acknowledging the pain, restoring the broken hearts and releasing imprisoned spirits. It's no wonder that people wept as they discovered freedom I could never have provided. I was simply the face Jesus used to connect them with God.

All this has me thinking about how we are. I wonder how many of us like to have TV going or the radio on in the background. We fill our spaces with noise. We read the newspaper, do the puzzles, talk on the phone, make ourselves busy as much as we are able because we are afraid of the silence, afraid of what might happen in those in-between spaces. When we pray we talk incessantly, rarely pausing for long enough for God to get a word in. And when we do pause it is usually while we think about what we are going to pray next.

I know that not everyone is like that. Some people love being still and quiet. I also know that there are some people who detest silence. But if my experience of those 12 months has taught me anything, it is that all of us sometimes need someone to be silent with us, so we have space for the Spirit to work in us. Unfortunately that creative listening is hard to come by.

Look at little Samuel. As a boy he was so unused to those creative silences that when God began to speak to him he had no idea what to do with it. And worse, it took Eli, someone who should have been used to hearing from God, three times round to realise what might be happening. In time Samuel became a powerful listener. And because he practised listening God kept speaking to him. I am quite sure God would have spoken to Eli if he had made space. Just as I am confident that God would speak to any one of us if we made space to listen. As I write I am imagining God breaking down in tears because I made

space to listen. Because you made space to listen. Because we are usually so busy talking, giving God instructions, filling our space with everything but stillness that there is never room to whisper those gentle words of love and care. We are going to sing Be Still and Breathe and then we are going to take some space to listen for God.

Be still/Breathe (D, Em, E7, A)

David J Evans

Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now, with reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord,
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

Breath

Marie Barnett

This is the air I breathe

This is the air I breathe

Your holy presence

Living in me

This is my daily bread

This is my daily bread

Your very word

Spoken to me

And I... I'm desperate For You

And I... I'm lost without You

Reading

John 10:22-30

²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one."

Reflection

One of the things about creative listening is that it doesn't judge. When I listen creatively I am not looking to set myself higher than you. I'm not searching for ways to make myself, or my preferences more important or more valuable than yours. I bring myself down (or up) to your level, whatever that may be and attempt to be with you in the moment. I'm not trying to come up with an answer to what you are expressing, I am listening, nothing more and nothing less.

When Jesus talks about his sheep knowing his voice it is because they have listened to his voice. They have discovered that it is safe when they are close to his voice. Interestingly they lead as often as they follow. The sheep know where to find the good grass. Sometimes they make wrong turnings and need

to be guided back. Sometimes they fall off the track and get stuck or injured and need help. There is a sense of partnership between the shepherd and the sheep. I think that is important to remember when we are listening creatively. There is a partnership between the listener and the speaker.

It has me wondering if it is here we can learn one of the fundamental characteristics of the Pharisees who disputed with Jesus. They were never interested in listening creatively, never prepared to make a space where God could speak and act. What motivated them in their words and actions was to be in control of the situation. When Jesus challenged their control and questioned their way of doing life their response wasn't to listen and consider what he said. Instead they reacted, stung to make it clear that they were the ones in control and not Jesus. That thin skin and inability to listen, to truly hear what Jesus was saying meant that they made poor decisions. Anger clouded their judgement as they attempted to assert their authority.

This is where listening becomes a more difficult task because real listening has the potential to challenge our assumptions and worse, our deeply held values and beliefs. I am constantly intrigued at the number of people who are anti-gay until someone in their family comes out as gay and all of a sudden they find themselves facing their own fears and prejudices. It is remarkable how often 'true flag bearers of the faith,' discover a different way of thinking about people with alternative views to their own when it comes closer to home. It leaves you to wonder if, instead of insisting that their way was the only way, they had listened creatively, allowing God to work in the space created. They might have seen God at work in a new if perhaps challenging way.

To be fair to the Pharisees, it is never easy to have your way of life, of understanding life, threatened in the way Jesus did. None of us like having our comfortable way of life disrupted, especially when it means we risk losing control of how things are happening. The most obvious response to threats like that is to put up barriers and do our best to keep the mutinous ideas from gaining any traction. Women in ministry. Must not happen! Homosexual, transgender, queer, bisexual, lesbian, anathema. Slavery is fine – Abraham had slaves. All of these things are issues the church has or continues to wrestle with.

Unfortunately, a lot of the wrestling is because people refuse to be still and allow God to speak into the creative silences of listening. Instead, our instinct is to fight the difference, claim God is the same yesterday, today and forever and

so we must slavishly follow centuries old interpretations of cultural preferences from societies that no longer exist. All of which is a very long-winded way of saying that when we listen in a way that co-creates with God we don't bring judgement to the table. Certainly there the times when we need to make decisions about what and how we will say things. But we need to do that from the level of people who are affected by our decisions. The Pharisees did not and would not do that. They had predetermined that they were right and anything that went against that was to be put down as forcefully as possible. There was no sense of, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

I want to leave you with this. As co-creators with God we have a responsibility to listen. To listen in the first instance to God as we are guided by the Holy Spirit. To listen to ourselves as God speaks into our lives. And to listen to those around us. Not listening while preparing a pithy answer but listening because there is a creative space in listening that enables the Holy Spirit to make, to guide, to heal, to re-create, to refresh, to love and to hold. When we create in our listening we begin to see God at work in and through us in sometimes surprising and always hope giving ways. That seems to me like a pretty good way to be.

We Pray

Enveloping God, who longs to listen to us and to be heard by us. Help us to find our way as co-creators with you into that place where listening is a central part of who and how we are as your people. Teach us to be swift to listen, to make space for your Spirit to surprise us with your grace. Teach us to be slow to judgement as we make space for others to be surprised by your grace. Come, fill our hearts with your peace as you heal and create in us and through us. Through Christ who stepped into our world to listen to you, to us, for us. Amen.

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

Offering

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

Holy giver of all good blessings, we find ourselves under a debt we can never overcome. Every blessing we have received or hope to receive comes from your generosity. The gifts we bring to you this morning pale in comparison to the bottom line of our ledger. Yet you manage your kingdom on a different economic model – one where the equity is grace, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, and justice. You encourage us to be shrewd in the world's money, knowing it is not the currency that matters in the end. And so, we pray in the name of Jesus, whose life and death paid our debt. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

God of mercy and healing,
you who hear the cries of those in need,

receive these petitions of your people
that all who are troubled
may know peace, comfort, and courage.

- For the people of Venezuela and Cuba, suffering under complete economic breakdown
- For those suffering incurable disease, facing their end too soon, experiencing unspoken pain and fear
- For those lost in addiction, lives stolen by drugs – legal and illegal
- For the leaders of nations, wrestling with struggling economies, the failure of wealth to be shared fairly, too many problems and insufficient willpower to correct wrongs done.
- For ourselves and those we love.

Life-giving God,
heal our lives,
that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds
and offer you thanks from generation to generation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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

I, the Lord of sea and sky

Daniel L. Schutte

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in deepest sin
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them,
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

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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