

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Good

25 September 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 113

Praise the LORD!

Yes, give praise, O servants of the LORD.

Praise the name of the LORD!

Blessed be the name of the LORD now and forever.

Everywhere—from east to west—

praise the name of the LORD.

For the LORD is high above the nations;

his glory is higher than the heavens.

**Who can be compared with the LORD our God,
who is enthroned on high?**

Praise the LORD!

O worship the King

O worship the King all glorious above,
and gratefully sing his power and his love:
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

O tell of his might and sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast, by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
whom angels delight to hymn thee above!
Your humble creation, with glory ablaze,
in true adoration shall sing to your praise!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Hey, God. How are you today? Just thought we would check in and see how you're doing. We've got a bit going on, but thought maybe it would be nice to sit with you and chill out a little. Pause.

What do you think about the weather at the moment? It's nice that it's getting warmer, and the birds are out in force, singing their hearts out. Lambs dancing around the paddocks. Daffodils and tulips jumping out of the earth. You've done an amazing job of making it a beautiful place to be. Pause.

Sorry we don't stop by more often. We get side-tracked and spend so much of our time on things less important. What's happening for you right now? Pause. We're going to sing some songs, do a bit of talking and a bit of listening, say some prayers, listen to the Bible being read. Help us to hear you, to be with you while we do all those things. Help us to be with you while we do all the other things that fill our time and use our energy. Teach us to live in your presence as a normal thing and not just a Sunday thing. Pause.

Amen

How do I hear 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 Genesis 1:24-31

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Reflection

Have you ever done something, anything, stepped back and thought, that’s good? Maybe you have planned a party and it has all come together and you’ve thought to yourself, ‘I’ve done a good job.’ Or perhaps you’ve made something and thought, ‘That’s pretty good.’ Or gone for a long walk and got your heart rate up and thought, ‘That’s good.’ Or settled down with a book in the sunshine and relaxed and thought to yourself, ‘This is good.’

Turn to a neighbour and tell them about one thing you’ve done that you think was good. How did you feel? What did you think?

We like thinking that we are, we have been, good. That we do good things. At the same time, we have this constant nagging at the back of our minds that maybe we aren’t really good. Maybe the times when we have felt like we have been good are aberrations and not the truth of the matter. Which can cause us to question what it even means to be good. So, I am going to worry the bone around what is good for a bit. Thinking out loud in a way and you may have your own thoughts and ideas to add into the mix.

I begin with a premise that human beings are binary creatures. By that I don’t mean that we have two of things like hands and feet and eyes. What I mean is that for the most part we see things in black and white, off and on, good or bad. We have a rather poor facility for recognising the in-between. An obvious example of this is that the worst times of day for car accidents are at dawn and nightfall. This is because the ‘half-light’ confuses our senses that are best

designed for light on or light off but nothing in between. We hate that no-man's land of a draw – there are winners and losers and there is nothing useful in between. Even the Bible tells us that we should let our yes be yes and our no, no. The desire for a clear, concise, non-ambiguous answer seems to be baked right into us.

Unfortunately, as we all come to realise as we get older, life is not all blacks and whites. There are infinite shades of grey between the two. And what is worse is when one set of shades conflict with another set. For example, a young person's parents tell them they need to be home by 10pm. They know there is a little leeway in there, but it is important to the parents and thus important to the young person. So far, so easy. The young person is going out with someone they rather like. They want to spend as much time with each other as they can possibly manage. On its own, an easy choice to make. BUT, when the needs of the couple are weighed against the needs of the parents there is clear and present conflict. Both sets of needs exist, and both sets of needs are valid. The parents would say, 'Home by 10 and that is the end of the story.' But we all know that it is not the end of the story. Suddenly, for the young person at the centre there is no clear, concise, non-ambiguous answer to a seemingly simple situation. If they obey their parents, they are 'good' in the eyes of their parents. If they stay out longer, they are 'good' in the eyes of their someone. Parents would argue for one thing, young people for another. Neither are wholly correct, and neither are wholly wrong. It is a grey in-between.

Of course, this is just a single example. I am sure that with a little thought we could think of many other examples where two different good things are in opposition to each other and the point at which they meet is a murky space full of confusion. Think crime and punishment, poverty and welfare, kinds of education, economic ideas, the list goes on and on. Without it we would have no place for politics, shock, horror.

So, this is our problem – what is good? How do we know it is good when we see it? How do we know that this good is better than another good? We could go down an endless rabbit hole of, 'If this, then that,' but I don't think it is helpful, at least right now. The question that needs answering is, 'How do I choose the right good?'

First up, just to be completely annoying, I am not sure that with the exception of extreme edge cases there is such a thing as the 'right good.' Many things

that are good in one moment are not good at another. This cake is good today. Left for a week it may no longer be quite so good. It is good to discipline a child in the right moment but leave it for too long and the punishment will no longer have context, definitely not a good thing. Everything can rapidly become very confusing.

In the end I can't give you a straight answer to the question of what the right good might be. I can only give you another question.

Will the decision you make or the action you take build stronger relationship – with God, yourself, and others? Even this question has pitfalls. But it points to something else that we too easily forget in the church – God has given us brains for a reason. We need to exercise them when we come to the grey murk of what is good. And we need to share our conundrums and confusions because there is wisdom in many councillors. More in a moment. First we are going to sing.

Blessed be your name

Matt Redman

Blessed Be Your Name in the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow blessed be Your name
Blessed Be Your name when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord Still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be' blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering blessed be Your name

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name

Reading

Mark 3:1-6

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Reflection

Sometimes, when we get it right and we do something good, it is not seen by everyone else as good. In the case of our reading, it is clear to an external observer that what Jesus has done is good. He has healed a man with a withered hand. There is no question that the healing was a good thing. But the Pharisees didn't see it that way. I doubt that if pressed they would have been forced to admit that the man being healed was good. The problem was that they saw a clash of goods going on. For them, the good that had been performed was done in opposition to another good that they held to be more important. No working on the sabbath was an important good. If the man wanted to be healed he could come back another day and Jesus could do the work of healing then.

Of course, you and I look at the situation with the benefit of 2000 years and think how stupid the whole argument was. Why should it matter if the man is healed on the sabbath? Jesus, on the surface of his words would agree with our assessment. I think there is more to it than that. God is very clear in the Old Testament – which was the only Testament back then – that the sabbath was to be kept holy. There were religious reasons for that, as well as social, physical, and economic reasons for the rule. In fact, the whole issue is not at all clear cut and Jesus would have known this. There was no particular reason why the man with the withered hand couldn't have been healed the next day.

When Jesus performed the healing he was making an active decision to choose one good over another. In doing so he was upsetting those who felt that the good he had chosen was less important than the good of their preference.

Truth be told, this happens all the time. When different goods clash people often become upset. Which leads me back to our first reading. We read that

God saw everything that he had made and it was very good. Even then there is a hint at a conflict of different kinds of good. Every green plant is given for food. What then of the carnivores – lions and tigers. Did they eat grass? It's highly unlikely. So unless they were created after the fall we are only seeing the part of the story that suits the narrative. What is the good we are looking for? That of peace and safety. Which is fine unless you have a digestive system that cannot process vegetables and fruit. In which case you would have a very short lifespan. There is no question in my mind that God understood all this. There is no question for me that when God created human beings, we were given the tools to work through what all this means for us.

Which leads me to ask, 'What did God mean when he said that it was very good?' I have this feeling that the creation story is not designed to give us some hint of paradise lost. Rather it is there to remind us that as we co-create with God everything, and I mean everything, we do has the potential to be good, and the potential to be less than good. Does that mean that we cease creating lest we make a mistake and end up with something not good? Not at all. It means that we create and see that in our best attempts, in any attempt, we are emulating our creator. We may often create in ways that seem destined to fail from conception. We should always create with a view to being able to say, 'It is very good.' Not because it is perfect, but because in creating we are fulfilling our destiny, made in the image of the creator God. Creating is good, even when our feeble hands make a mess of it. And sometimes in our mess something amazing comes to life.

We Pray

Good, good God. We are frequently confused and dismayed when our efforts to do something good seem to come to nothing or worse. We want to believe we are at least not bad, but quietly afraid that we are really just not very good at all. Help us to see that you love us no matter how much good or not good we manage. Guide us to keep creating, keep adding what good we can to the world. Grant us courage to work for the greater good. Walk alongside us and use our small talents to your glory. Through Jesus who challenged good with good. Amen.

Just let me say

Geoff Bullock

Just let me say how much I love You
Let me speak of Your mercy and grace
Just let me live in the shadow of Your beauty
Let me see You face to face
And the earth will shake as Your Word goes forth
And the heavens can tremble and fall
But let me say how much I love You
O my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Just let me hear Your finest whispers
As You gently call my name
And let me see Your power and Your glory
Let me feel Your Spirit's flame
Let me find You in the desert
'Til this sand is holy ground
And I am found completely surrendered
To You, my Lord and friend

So let me say how much I love You
With all my heart I long for You
For I am caught in this passion of knowing
This endless love I've found in you
And the depth of grace and forgiveness found
To be called a child of God
Just makes me say how much I love You
Oh my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Offering

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

God of justice and mercy, we come to worship you this day as ones who, on the great balance scale of your creation, are more like the rich man in the Gospel story than we are Lazarus. The parable Jesus tells reminds us that we have work to do as we strive to see God's kingdom come in our world. As we offer gifts today, may we do so striving to be those blessed to be a blessing. In Christ's holy name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

The on-going devastating results of climate change, as Shanghai, China, braces for a violent typhoon.

The flooding in Pakistan that has not only taken more than 1300 lives and displaced millions, but threatens an already-struggling economy with serious food shortages.

A bombing by Russia of a dam, a civilian infrastructure with no military value, in Ukraine and the subsequent flooding of homes.

A Prayer to Learn to Love the World Again

Sarah Bessey

God of herons and heartbreak,
teach us to love the world again.

Teach us to love extravagantly
knowing it may

(it will) break our hearts
and teach us that it is worth it.

God of pandemics and suffering ones,
teach us to love the world again.

God of loneliness and longing,
of bushfires and wilderness,
of soup kitchens and border towns,
of snowfall and children,
teach us to love the world again.

Amen

For our families and friends, the people we meet each day, our lovers and loved ones, the ill, the weak, the travellers.

Through Christ who finds us in our pain and weakness we 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

All hail the power

Edward Perronet

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.

Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all!

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race

Ye ransomed from the fall,

hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

Hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe

On this terrestrial ball

to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.

To him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all!

Oh, that with all the sacred throng
we at his feet may fall!

We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.

We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.

Benediction and Grace

As we go from here may we keep creating good in our world...

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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