

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Contagious

30 October 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;

**for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.**

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

**Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.**

Lift up your heads, O gates!

and be lifted up, O ancient doors!

that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty,

Who is this King of glory?

**The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory.**

How great is our God

Chris Tomlin

The splendour of a king, clothed in majesty

Let all the earth rejoice, all the earth rejoice

He wraps Himself in light and darkness tries to hide

And trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice

How great is our God

Sing with me how great is our God

And all will see

How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands and time is in His hands

Beginning and the end, beginning and the end

The Godhead Three in One, Father, Spirit and Son

The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names, worthy of all praise
My heart will sing how great is our God

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Bethne Dodd

Spacious Lover of earth and sea, synergy of soil and sand.
Dark-sky God of nuanced night where lucent stars pierce southern skies.
You are the creative force making moonlight, working wonder, sifting snow.
You are our unseasonable Springtime southerly - disruptive, unwelcome.
Our hair-in-eyes kind of God - scouring skin, snatching breath, sending us
indoors to become our shelter on best-behind-glass sort of days.
As we close the door against the wind, You whisper, 'There's no such thing as
bad weather - only the wrong clothes' *
Which is why You stir us to re-brave life's elements in order to build strength
and resilience - insulated by love, swathed in grace, rugged up in faith.
To adapt and grow, and even revel in unpredictable storms.
Until - as seabirds on wings of the air - we are upheld on unseen currents and
learn, in time, to navigate them with skilful practiced ease.

Be our fresh wind, our Southern Cross.
And when we fail to embrace the inevitable weathering of our lives, forgive our
unwillingness to face the storm.

We bring our private confessions before You now...

Breathe new life into us by Your ever creative Spirit that we, in turn, might
learn to breathe life into others.

Amen

(Billy Connolly quote)*

Notices

The Peace

Reading Acts 10:30-33, 44-48 *(St Pauls)*

³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was
praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me.

³¹ He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been
remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is
called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.'

³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to

come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”

Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Reflection

Yawning video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3QYDtSbhrA>

How many of you caught yourself yawning in response to that short clip? I’m sure we’re all familiar with the idea of – don’t start yawning, you’ll set me off. Yawning seems to be contagious – once someone starts people just can’t stop. It turns out there are physical and psychological reasons for that. People who exhibit greater empathy are more likely to yawn when someone else yawns, but it’s not just that. It turns out that yawning helps clear our ear canals and cool our brains down – who knew! It turns out that our brains heat up when we are tired or stressed and so they don’t work optimally. By yawning our brains cool and it helps us to focus better on our environment. There’s more to it, but that will do for now. I thought it would be a fun way of getting us focussed on today’s theme – Creating is Contagious.

To bring those from St Pauls up to speed we have been talking over the last few months about how God has created us to be creators. Right from the very beginning we were designed in the image of God and that image is of a creator. This means everything about who and how we are as God’s images rests on us being creators. Now I know what many of you are thinking – ‘I’m not very creative.’ I am going to disagree with you.

The thing is, we have been tricked into thinking that to be creative you have to be writing or painting or dancing or singing or something similar. The creative arts are sold as everything there is to creating. I’m here to say, ‘Rubbish!’ to that. The arts are simply a small slice of the cake. Creating in the image of God is all about adding something good to the world. It can be a happy smile to a stranger, reading a good book and being refreshed, cleaning the kitchen, cooking a meal, pottering in the garden, listening to a child read, building mud

pies in the rain. So much of what we do as human beings is creative and creating.

All that creating is contagious. Have you ever noticed how the sound of a happy child at play lifts everyone? How completing a task makes you feel better and that feeling transfers its way into everything else you do? When we create it is catching and people around us want to get in on the action. We are going to watch a short video that some of you may have seen before, but it bears watching again.

Amnesty video looking into eyes:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJ5zx_lavs

This sitting, looking into another person's soul is creation at its most beautiful. You can see how it catches the heart and the mind and draws you into a life lived beyond your own.

I have a feeling this is something of what Peter may have experienced when he went to visit Cornelius. I think that he may have expected go to this Gentile's home, tell the story and then leave again without much happening. We see that the Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded when the Holy Spirit fell on these uncircumcised Gentiles. But Peter had had the experience of gazing into Jesus' eyes. I think he spent time gazing into the eyes of Cornelius and his household. Something happened in those moments of being connected with each other through the Holy Spirit and life would never be the same for any of them. From there the contagion caught hold and swept across the world.

For scholars and preachers, the explanation for what happened, the justification for how they define the world is wrapped up in what Peter said – the telling of Jesus' story. I think the contagious message had words to go with it, but the real contagion was far humbler than that. It was found in the simple creativity of people connecting with one another and the Holy Spirit taking that connection and gifting an ever-deepening sense of God's presence made real through people. The creativity of the Gospel is not in carefully refined words and suitable doctrine, it is in the hope and joy that are found in human connection. Because of that it is messy and disjointed, unplanned and unpredictable – in a word, creative.

Crown him with many crowns

Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring

Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark! how the heav'nly anthem drowns
All music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.

Crown Him the Virgin's Son,
The God Incarnate born,
Whose arm those crimson trophies won
Which now His brow adorn:
Fruit of the mystic Tree,
As of that Tree the Stem;
The Root whence flows Thy mercy free,
The Babe of Bethlehem.

Crown Him the Lord of Love:
Behold His hands and side;
Rich wounds yet visible above
In beauty glorified:
No angel in the sky
Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his burning eye
At mysteries so bright.

Crown Him the Lord of years,
The Potentate of time.
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.

Reading

Luke 5:17-20

¹⁷ One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; ¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. ²⁰ When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

Reflection

There are some things in life that, for whatever reason you might give, you show up for. I suspect that even the most avid supporters of the English royal family would have been staggered by the huge turnout of people to pay their final respects to Queen Elizabeth II. Of course, there are other things people turn out for. I went to a Dunedin match of the Rugby World Cup so I could say I had been a part of an event that will likely never happen in New Zealand again. People go to concerts to see their favourite artists perform. They travel long distances and pay a lot of money to be in a particular place at a particular time. I guess you could say these things are contagious, but I think it may be stretching the meaning of the word a little.

What is really contagious is when you see someone so excited about something that you follow along just to see what is happening. Come with me. Come and see this carpenter from Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth. It doesn't matter, come and see because it is special. Come on. Come with me and we'll take our friend to see Jesus. I heard amazing things are going on. Maybe Jesus will do something special and he'll get to walk again. Come on, let's go, we're wasting time.

In a sense the contagion is not directly the result of what Jesus is doing or saying. It is in the response of the people who are gathering to see him. Come with me. Come with me. There is an energy that builds on itself as people generate excitement and anticipation grows. Even the frowning of the Pharisees, who have likely come expecting Jesus to upset them, contributes to buzz going around. What is he going to do or say next? I'm no Jesus, but I get that here sometimes with people asking each other, 'What's going on, what's he going to do next? Even here there can be a sense of anticipation, sometimes dread, at what might be coming to disrupt and challenge.

In a way, everything we do has the ability to disrupt and challenge. It mostly doesn't, but it can. Let me give you a simple example. I have always brushed my teeth with my right hand. Recently I decided to try brushing my teeth with my left hand. It felt decidedly weird. It took way longer to get the job done, my hand ached, I found my head bobbing in odd ways to go with the strange action of my left hand. Over time, as I persevered it has become easier, though still not a natural feeling. What I discovered is that I am much more aware of how I am brushing my teeth and I suspect I am doing a better job as a result. Definitely a weird example, but take a moment to consider some everyday action that you could change up a little. How might it change your thinking or your actions?

Strange as it may seem, this making simple changes to everyday actions is an important aspect of creativity. Think of it this way. Suppose you had a garden and every day you went out to weed that garden. It's a large garden so you can't get to the whole thing in one go. So every day you go out and you weed one section. The same section every day. You never make it to the rest of the garden. The piece of garden you are working on looks wonderful. But what about the rest? It probably looks like most of my garden 😊. A small change, moving to a different part of the garden every day, will make a big change to how the whole garden looks. The creativity of weeding, of creating space for the flowers and plants to grow spreads out and covers more and more ground. How you feel about your garden will change and grow as well, even if you don't enjoy weeding.

Like us, the disciples didn't enjoy change very much. You might remember the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. The next day the disciples came to get him saying, 'everyone is looking for you.' Jesus replied, 'Let's go to the rest of the villages so I can preach there also. This is why I've come.' This is a part of his contagious ministry. He is not letting anyone hold him tight and shutting down the Good News. He is giving as many people as possible the opportunity to catch the dis-ease with the status quo and to spread it around, the very definition of contagious.

Here, I want to leave you with a challenge. Jesus created a dis-ease, both among those who were at the bottom of the heap and among elite who upheld the status quo. I want to suggest that we in the church are no longer among those who challenge the status quo. We ARE the status quo. Those who have any sense of dis-ease have mostly left or are in the process of leaving. We struggle with being contagious in our faith because we are afraid that

everything we know and are comfortable with will change. We forget that even though we might choose to brush our teeth with our left hand, our right hand is still attached. Jesus came to seek and to restore the lost. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Jesus left Peter's village to preach in all the other villages. That is why he came. Jesus spoke to those in power and those without power. That is what we are called into. Not to simply keep our piece of the garden tidy, but to go to the next and the next so every part of the garden can be cared for. And all of this is messy and disjointed, uncomfortable and fickle. All of it is found in the hope and the joy that is human connection. And that human connection through Christ is contagious creativity. Your turn...

We Pray

Friending God, who looks into our eyes and sees us better than we see ourselves. You know our hopes and dreams, and our fears. You have created us to be co-creators with you, through all the messiness that is being human. Help us to catch the dis-ease that Jesus brings and to share it with everyone we meet. Guide us to find the hope and joy in human connection that shares the Good News better than any words we can hope to find. Challenge us to lead with our left when we are more comfortable with our right, to weed beyond the easy patch and be contagiously creative in our faith. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Celebrate

Gary Oliver

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate
Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

He is risen, He is risen
And He lives forevermore
He is risen, He is risen
Come on and celebrate
The resurrection of our Lord

Come, now is the time

Brian Doerksen

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God
Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now

Offering

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

Compassionate God, you reach across the chasms that we've created, the ones where we've isolated ourselves from the redemptive power of your love. Bridges have been built, and people who believed they were beyond your embrace have been welcomed to the table with open arms! As we give to you this day, may we give with an explosion of gratitude and generosity – and may we also know the joy that passes all understanding! We pray this in the name of Jesus, who invites himself to our table! Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

St Pauls

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who is 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 serve a risen Saviour

Alfred Henry Ackley

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.
I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer;
And just the time I need Him He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me a
Along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me I see His loving care,
And though my heart grows weary, I never will despair;
I know that He is leading, through all the stormy blast;
The day of His appearing will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King!
The Hope of all who seek Him, the Help of all who find,
None other is so loving, So good and kind.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here, may we contagiously spread the dis-ease that is the Gospel, even as we struggle with it ourselves and may our days be filled with creating that is catching...

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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