

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Growing

09 October 2022

Call to Worship – Psalm 66

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

**Sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.**

Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

**All the earth worships you;
they sing praises to you,
sing praises to your name.” *Selah***

Bless our God, O peoples,

**Let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.**

For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.

**We went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

Praise my soul the king of heaven

Henry Francis Lyte

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.

Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour
to his people in distress.

Praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.

Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows.

In his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.

Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face.

Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.

Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

A riff based on a poem by Bliss Carman

When all the stars are sown
Across the night-blue space,
With the immense unknown,
In silence face to face.

There are no words to fully speak
The vastness of the gift
That gazes down upon us
And draws our eyes to lift

We stand in speechless awe
While Beauty marches by,
And wonder at the God
Who wears such majesty.

We glory in reflected light
That springs from God's great love
Our hearts flow overfilled with life
The well, the bread, the wine of hope

How small a thing I am
In all that world-sown vast,
That I should hope or plan
Or dream my dream could last!

The Lamb lies down before me
God leaning in with grace
To lead me gently down the path
And hold me through the stormy blast

We are gathered in by our loving God and bring our private confessions now.
Held and loved we are separated from our sin as far as the east is from the west. Amen

I cry out to God – Psalm 69:16-17

Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

Notices

The Peace

Reading Acts 10:1-20, 23b

Peter and Cornelius

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³ One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸ and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. ¹⁸ They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are

searching for you. ²⁰ Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.”

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him.

Reflection

There's no such thing as standing still in the kingdom of God. I rather think there is no such thing as standing still in most of life. We are either moving forward or going backwards, growing or shrinking. I know when I pull back and stop trying to grow and develop I become less. My vision becomes less and I no longer see as far as I once did. My hope becomes less and I find it more difficult to believe God is with me. My ability to live and love and to minister becomes less as I slowly withdraw into myself. Even if I try my level best to hold on to what I had, my grip will slip and those things will fall away, sometimes slowly, sometimes very quickly.

A story to illustrate. I had a friend I respected for their drive and their vision. I would frequently take time to sit with them to talk about what I was seeing and learning. Over time I began to realise I was regularly hearing the same stories, in some cases to the point I think I could have told the stories myself. As I looked deeper I began to see that what I had initially seen as drive and vision was simply repeating a formula that had worked for them in the past. Over the course of a couple of years I watched as that person's ministry gradually deteriorated and lost shape. They were still doing some good things and people were still being blessed by what they offered. The problem was the vision they shared wasn't looking toward a new future, but back toward a fondly remembered past.

I could see too that sometimes I am tempted to look back toward a fondly remembered past. It's not that remembering the past is a good thing. It is thinking that our future should somehow be the same as our past that is dangerous. Of course, there are many caveats to what I am saying, but rather than run through the 10 major reasons why thinking about the past can be helpful (and it can), I want to focus on how thinking about the future is more helpful. Yes, I agree that those who don't learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them. I also believe that those who live in the past will never figure out how to do it better.

Let's think about Peter for a moment. Peter had made some incredible leaps in his understanding of what Jesus had come to do and how God was working through Jesus for the people of Israel. He had gone from the miserable denier

of Jesus to an outstanding preacher of the Gospel and taken on a leadership role among the early believers. It would be perfectly reasonable to think that he had made great progress and could afford to keep on doing what was clearly working. I am fairly sure we would have never heard the good news if that is what had happened. At least, not in the way we have it now. Why? Because if Peter had not continued to grow, and alongside him all the other believers who looked to him for leadership the early church would have slowly slid backwards into a small, uninteresting cult of disaffected Jews.

God had other ideas. God knew that Peter needed to grow, to step out of his safe comfort zone and stretch into the unthinkable – the good news was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

So, we see some men sent to Joppa to bring Peter to meet Cornelius, a centurion living in Caesarea. These are people Peter would have never deigned to meet if they had turned up on the doorstep unannounced. He would have determined that they were not Jews and not fit to receive the Gospel. To be blunt, it was racism. You're not Jewish so you are less than.

God knew all this. After all, Jesus had lived next to Peter for the last three years. So there was a plan in place to get Peter over the hump of what I am going to call, 'good enough.' Good enough because it was working. The church was growing, people were coming to faith. It was good enough. Why change when everything is going well? Ask any company that has gone out of business after experiencing extraordinary success – resting on your laurels will lead to failure.

Cue Peter on the roof to pray. He's hungry and like many of us when we pray he fell asleep. (let's be honest, it's way more common that we care to admit) He dreamed that a sheet came down from heaven holding all kinds of unclean animals. Now Peter was a rough as guts fisherman, but he was also a practising Jew. Eating unclean food was simply not on the menu. A voice tells him to eat and he protests. Then he hears the voice tell him that he is not to treat what God has made clean with disdain. The whole experience repeats three times. What we see here is God taking Peter out of his comfort zone and forcing him to grow beyond his fixation on the Gospel for the Jews and understand that the Good News is for everyone, Jews and Gentiles. This is huge! The Gospel is suddenly not just for the restricted world of the Jewish nation, it is for the whole world. Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. Yes, we are told Jesus had already said the Gospel was for every nation, but most humans are pretty good at justifying their own interpretation of things. Now Peter was

confronted with a new reality and he had no choice but to grow. In growing an opportunity for creating new life for people all around the world, including you and me became a reality. I think that's something worth celebrating!

Celebrate

Don Moen

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

Reading Luke 17:11-19

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Reflection

I want to ask you to be honest with yourself. Think of a time when you have missed an opportunity because you have been more focussed on yourself than on what is happening around you. Ask yourself what might have been different if you had been less absorbed in yourself and more aware of the rest of the world. Personally, I can think of far more examples in my life than I care to admit. Some of those were probably inconsequential. Others may have radically affected the course of my life and the lives of those around me. Now, think about those ten lepers. There is no question that their lives were radically

transformed by their healing. They went from being outcasts, unable to participate in even the simplest events in their community, to being able to live and work and love with their friends and families. They went from being the poorest of the poor, unable to support themselves and relying completely on the goodwill of strangers, to functioning members of society able to contribute to everything that went on. That is huge!

One of them made a decision that meant their change in status became more than simply moving into the useful contributor column. When he saw that he was healed, rather than simply continue on to get the tick of approval, he turned back and thanked Jesus. Why should that matter? More importantly, what difference might it make? I am sure the others were incredibly thankful and grateful. I have no doubt that they would have freely told anyone who cared to listen about the man who had healed them and enabled them to get back to their friends and families. So what is it about this one?

I would like to suggest that this one who turned back to say thank you moved in that moment from merely being physically healed (no small thing) to growing as a person. In recognising the one who had performed the healing expressing thanks the event for this person became a spiritual event in addition to just the physical. None of the others heard the words, 'your faith has made you well,' because they had not paused. Were they well?

Undoubtedly? Had it touched their spirits? I suspect not.

What I am going to say next is purely conjecture on my part. I have a suspicion that the nine simply went back to being and doing what they had been and done before their illness. For them there was no change apart from the healing. I also suspect that the tenth man, the Samaritan, was profoundly changed by his experience. (isn't it interesting how frequently Jesus uses Samaritans, people despised by the Jews, to demonstrate God's care for people). I suspect the tenth man spent the rest of his life gratefully serving others as a way of expressing his gratitude. All purely in my imagination, but it is borne out by what I have seen in real life. Think of the people who win big with the lottery and rather than being thankful they focus on themselves and it all disappears in a moment. Then think of those who receive gratefully and find that it brings life and hope far beyond their wildest dreams. Think of the pay-it-forward movement. Compare that with those who behave as though the world owes them a favour. How different the world might be if we took the opportunity to turn back and say thank you to Jesus a little more often. There is, in the moment of turning to Jesus and saying, 'Thank you,' something that

sparks new things and leads to growth. When we say thank you to God we create something inside ourselves that grows and becomes more than we were before. I suspect Peter discovered something similar when he visited Cornelius and discovered God at work in the Gentiles. In his words to the other apostles, 'Who was I to hinder the work of God?' And they praised and thanked God. And the creating continues even today in you and in me. Thanks be to God.

We Pray

God of seeds and surprises, of living and loving and gratefulness we thank you that you call each of us to continue to grow. We confess that frequently it seems nice to pause a while and simply enjoy the comfort of what we know. And then we forget to get growing again. Help us to find a healthy balance of growing in you and being still with you. We are so quick to lean into one at the expense of the other. Teach us to turn back and say thank you regularly. And to listen for the challenge to grow beyond what we know, to your glory we pray, Amen.

Who you say I am

Reuben Morgan, Ben Fielding

Who am I that the highest King
Would welcome me
I was lost but He brought me in
Oh His love for me
Oh His love for me

Who the Son sets free, Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of God, Yes I am

Free at last He has ransomed me
His grace runs deep
While I was a slave to sin
Jesus died for me
Yes He died for me

Who the Son sets free, Oh is free indeed
I'm a child of God, Yes I am
In my Father's house there's a place for me
I'm a child of God, Yes I am

I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am

Offering

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

God of love and compassion, the need for your presence in this world is often overwhelming. Confrontation and division are everywhere we look: in communities, in our countries, in our church, and in our world. We have endured much, and others have had to endure so much more. The apostle Paul reminds us that if we endure, we will reign with Jesus. May the gifts we give help all your children endure in these strange and challenging times. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

God of salvation,
who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost,
hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day,
receiving these petitions and thanksgivings
with your unending compassion.

For those in Somalia, East Africa, plagued by a drought that now borders on famine. And in thanksgiving for Save the Children, the U.N. Somalia Humanitarian Fund, and all organizations and individuals providing food, water, and medical provisions to the millions of people, many of whom are women and children, who are suffering, despondent, and afraid. Turn the hearts of Al-Shabab, the Islamic insurgent group which is adding the violence of Civil War to Somalians already suffering. Impede their actions, terminate their efforts, disband their units.

For caregivers of all kinds who care for and see those the world tries not to see, and calls them by their names. Those who work with the feeble, the severely disabled, the annoying, those who keep vigil caring for those who cannot thank, and whose conditions will not improve.

For teachers and parents; doctors and scientists who are only now beginning to understand the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all of humanity. Grant them patience, community, and perseverance in the practices of healing.

For the love of pets, the delight of storytellers, the beautiful truths captured by artists, we thank you.

Jesus, El Shaddai, Timeless One, we name our troubles before you, believing that naming is the beginning of claiming your power to take on the forces of evil that threaten humanity and harm creation. Help us to see beyond the differences that separate us, and free us to collaborate on solutions that unite.

Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. 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

We are one in the Spirit

Peter Scholtes

We are one in the Spirit,
We are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity
may one day be restored:

And they'll know we are Christians
by our love, by our love.
Yes, they'll know we are Christians
by our love.

We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand,
And together we'll spread the news
That God is in our land.

We will work with each other,
We will work side by side,
And we'll guard each one's dignity
And save each one's pride:

All praise to the Father,
from whom all things come,
And all praise to Christ Jesus,
His only Son,
And all praise to the Spirit
Who makes us one:

[Benediction and Grace](#)

As we go on from here may we allow the Holy Spirit to stretch us, to grow us,
to mould us as God's own people.

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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