

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Unceasing

13 November 2022

Call to Worship – Isaiah 65

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

**the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.**

But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;

**for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.**

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

**They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;**

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

**They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.**

Lift high the cross

Shirley Erena Murray

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.

Come, Christians, follow where the Master trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.

So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Inexorable God

Summer follows Spring follows Winter follows Autumn

Winds roaring, rain crashing, sun beating

Shaping, reshaping earth and humanity

Relentless God

The hope of salvation

Opposing insurmountable odds

Turning your face to the future

Where faith lies in wait

Uncompromising God

Taking lost and broken human beings

Restoring in love

Rebuilding in mercy

Life returned through life lost

We rest in your presence

Our hearts cry out to you. We know our failures and our failing. We name those things that draw us away from your love and mercy. Hear our confessions now.

God is slow to anger and full of compassion.

He forgives all who humbly repent and trust in his Son as Saviour and Lord.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

The Peace

Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Reflection

Dripping water (recording)

The sound of constant dripping – enough to send the most tranquil person insane. In fact, it is something that has been used as a torture device. I can understand that. The bath in my old bathroom had a shower head above my head if I lay down in the bath. It would drip. If I wanted a relaxing bath I had to wrap the shower head in towel to absorb the drips because otherwise the dripping would drive me mad. And of course, dripping like that is unceasing. It never gives up. It puts me in mind of that person you may know who never stops talking. They are nice and mean well, but really, you just want to sit be quiet for a bit. Sigh.

The thought occurred that unceasing has something of a negative connotation in my mind. It obviously doesn't need to be a negative. The endless swell of the ocean, the always cycle of the seasons, the constant beating of my heart – until one day it doesn't. These are good things. But what about the seemingly unceasing conflict of nations, or the grinding poverty of some that never seems to leave us?

I think my discomfort comes from the fact that I have for a long time now, abhorred absolutes. I like that fact that black is black and white is white, but with few exceptions they are best used sparingly. Bright colour, pastel colour, rainbow colour, all flecked with whites and blacks and greys. But when people are forced into fitting one particular view of the world it damages them. Take a simple example. Imagine every young person in Oamaru was told they had to become a farmer. No matter their interests or abilities, farming was what they were to do. How healthy do you think that would be. Or imagine every person over the age of 75 being told they had to move into single room apartments in rest homes, no matter their physical or mental condition, no matter whether they were married or single. How healthy would that turn out to be?

We all know from experience that absolutes like that simply don't work. Yet we secretly store them up in our minds. Nobody should be on an unemployment benefit. No-one should ever have an abortion. Everyone who commits a crime should be locked up. If you don't work, you don't eat. Always there are exceptions. Sometimes there are more exceptions than the rule. Because absolutes don't work. Even absolute zero is aspirational and physically cannot ever be reached.

Then we come to our reading. An absolute. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. I have heard many people attempt to justify this by explaining all manner of approaches to prayer and to how we might feel and express ourselves. But we all know the truth is that no-one prays without ceasing. No-one is always rejoicing. There are times in our lives when rejoicing is perhaps the furthest thing in our minds as we grieve over lost love or lost opportunity. I'm very sure that we don't pray while we are asleep, and I suspect that when we are deeply focussed on a task most of us aren't praying then either. Even giving thanks in all circumstances can be a stretch. Sure, we may look back on a difficult time, see God walking with us, and give thanks. But in the moment, not so much.

What then do we do with this?

I think we take a step back and realise that sometimes absolutes are used for effect. In this case Paul is speaking to a group of people who are under the hammer. They are poor, they are on the fringes of society, and they have few resources of any kind. They have had people come and tell them all sorts of stories in an effort to get them to follow some brand or belief. They had probably met the circumcisers and the law-keepers. There were likely some who told them they couldn't be Christian unless they spoke in tongues. Perhaps some who carefully explained they couldn't eat this food or associate with that person. Paul uses absolutes to make a point and draw their focus away from all these distractions. He would have known better than most that rejoicing always didn't come easily or in every circumstance. That praying without ceasing was an aspiration, not a practical way of being.

He also knew that rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks are excellent food for the soul, giving sustenance when everything else seems grim and hopeless. So the pray without ceasing, rejoice always and give thanks in every circumstance was an encouragement to look beyond the hopelessness of now and see that God was, and still is in control.

Lord, I lift your name

Rick Founds

Lord I lift your name on high
Lord I love to sing your praises
I'm so glad you're in my life
I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay
From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord I lift your name on high

Reading Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Reflection

It may seem a little strange for me to have titled the message, ‘Creating is Unceasing’ when I am clearly not fond of the idea of unceasing. If I don’t like absolutes then why am I using an absolute. To an extent it is in a similar vein to Paul’s use of absolutes. None of us can sustain constant creation – we simply don’t have the resources to do so. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is there is a constant temptation to yield to the idea that if I can’t do it then I won’t try. There is, however, another way of looking things. What if I was to

tell you that unceasing creation is not only possible, it is normal. It is only absolute in the sense that it never ceases. For much of it we don't even have to think about it.

I'm going to use a rather cheeky example here, then I'm going to build on that as we go. Who here likes breathing? Has anyone managed to stop breathing for an extended period of time – say 5 minutes? It's a silly question, right? Stop breathing for 5 minutes and you have likely stopped breathing permanently. The thing about breathing is that we take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide – we are creating a new compound without even being aware of the chemical process that is going on in our bodies. That's unceasing creating right there. I think this is in part reflected in the lives of the birds in the air who neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet God continues to feed them. There is beautiful pattern to this unceasing creating we see all around us that reflects what is constantly happening in our own lives.

What about more conscious creating? Our every act of living is creative in nature – taking something and turning it into something else. Some wood to make a chair, some wool to make a jersey, some food to make a meal, some time to make a friend. Everything we do is a part of a creating process.

Let's dig a little deeper again, moving from things we have to do to live, to things we choose to do. There are very few people who would claim to have no hobbies. Even those few will have things they do in their day that change the world a little or a lot. Perhaps you play bowls or collect stamps (does anybody do that anymore?). Maybe you do the daily crossword or take your dog for a walk every day. Whatever it is you do there is creativity going on in all of it. Here is the kicker for me. None of it requires that we worry about it. Being co-creators with God doesn't require us to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. All that is necessary is for us to seek God's kingdom and the other things will follow. How do we do that? By rejoicing when we can, praying when we remember, and being thankful as often as possible. When we do that God steps in and fills in the missing parts. It's like Peter walking on the water. He couldn't actually walk on water. His job was to get out of the boat and start walking so that God could keep him on the surface. Miracles don't come out of us doing what we can do. They happen when we step out to do what we can't do and trust God to do the rest. And that is how creating can be unceasing – we do what we can, and trust God to fill our gaps.

We Pray

Unceasing God, even you took a break on the 7th day. Your creativity turned from building stars and raising mountains to resting in the light of your word. We are often tired, we wrestle with the things of life and wonder if we've achieved anything much at all. And you invite us to come and rest a while with you, to create as we can and allow you to fill our gaps. Help us to place our worries in your boundless arms and learn to rejoice and pray and be thankful as often as we can. Then watch as our puny efforts at co-creating are multiplied by your glorious grace and mercy. Amen.

Only You

Andy Park

No one but You Lord
Can satisfy this longing in my heart
Nothing I do Lord
Can take the place of drawing near to You

Only You can fill my deepest longing
Only You can breathe in me new life
Only You can fill my heart with laughter
Only You can answer my heart's cry

Father I love You
Come satisfy the longing in my heart
Fill me overwhelm me
Until I know Your love deep in my heart

Offering

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

Holy God who calls us to the journey: it is so easy for us to become distracted so that we wander off the path you have put before us. The chaos of the world around us catches our attention, and we neglect the inner journey that keeps us closer to you. As we set aside this time to bring our gifts to you, may you draw our attention back to the wisdom and guidance that you put before us, and may it lead us to endurance that will carry us to kingdom presence! In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Guide us to pray for those times when the fear of dying becomes almost too much to bear, when the fear of continuing to live in intolerable conditions is equally bad. In Uganda, where an outbreak of Ebola has already killed 48. In South Sudan, as the UN warns that two-thirds of the population risks severe hunger in 2023. In Ukraine, where Russian attacks continue. In Lebanon, where the number of cholera cases may already be in the thousands. Cholera is readily preventable and treatable – but Lebanon has collapsed from being a reasonably-affluent country to one that no longer has clean water, basic sanitation systems, or ready access to medical care.

Give us the words or even the actions to pray for those caught in the web of gang living and conflict. Where crime is a daily expectation and violence the accepted way of dealing with problems. Where women and children are regularly subjected to abuse and live in constant fear.

Lead us to pray for the people acting to change the world for the better. From scientists searching for cures for disease or better ways of making and storing energy, to the men and women who clean streets or hospitals or homes or businesses, and all the other jobs that create order from chaos.

Hear us as we pray for those we love, our friends, our families, our pets. For those things that matter to us and keep us awake at night. For the little things we are afraid to mention because they seem too small.

Amen

Blessed Assurance

Fanny Crosby

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect communion, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.
Angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest.
I in my Saviour am happy and bless'd,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we create with joy, in prayer and with much
thanks...

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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