

Creationist 2.0

Creating Challenges

05 March 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 15

O LORD, who may abide in your tent?

Who may dwell on your holy hill?

**Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;**

They do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,

**nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;
but who honour those who fear the LORD;**

They stand by their oath even to their hurt;
and do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved.

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

Birds in the apple tree, eating my apples

Caterpillars in the garden, eating my cabbages

Cats in the undergrowth, chasing my chickens

For some reason I get mad

At birds being birds

At caterpillars being caterpillars

At cats being cats

It's not like I created the apples or the cabbages or the chickens

Yet somehow I feel obliged

to chase the birds

and kill the caterpillars

and shake my fist at the cats

What strange beings we are, God

Taking ownership of things not ours

Complaining about nature being nature

Failing to see you in the midst of it all

Giving flight to the birds

Guiding the caterpillars

Designing the stealth of the cats

Grant us eyes to see and ears to hear your creative Spirit at work in the world around us. Gift us humility to live at peace with our world. Give us courage to work for your glory in everything we do.

We bring our private confessions before you now...

The Lord enrich us with his grace,

and nourish us with his blessing;

the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;

the Lord accept our prayers,

and absolve us from our offences,

for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.

The Peace

Reading

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Reflection

I’m going to show you some images and I invite you to pause with each one and consider how you feel about the image. What thoughts and ideas bubble up inside as you look at each image? Do you like it? Why? Do you not like it? Why? After each one I will give you a few moments to talk about your thoughts with a neighbour. Now a piece of music. Same thing – like, not like, why? I’ve also brought some art with me that I will show you and I invite you to respond in the same way to each piece.

I suspect that for most of you there was at least one piece among those that unsettled you. Perhaps all of them unsettled you. Yet each person who created those pieces put time and effort and a part of themselves into fashioning their art. They have added something good to the world. It may clash with your

senses and preferences but for others it may give them a fresh perspective on how they see the world, how they might respond to the world. I think this is something we forget all too easily, particularly as we grow older. We know what we like and heaven forbid if something we don't like comes across our path. But what if gaining an appreciation of what we don't like could add something of value to who and how we are – notice I don't suggest we have to like it. Let me give an example. I'm not a great fan of punk music – I find it jarring and unpleasant. Somewhat to my dismay I have realised over the years that Punk music is an expression of disconnection with a form of society in which I am all too comfortable to reside. The bands and their music represent pain, disappointment, disengagement, a deep sense of loss and fear of what the world is doing to them. I still don't like the music, but I have begun to understand a little of what gives rise to this anarchic, discordant expression of art. And it challenges me in my thinking and my behaviour. How do I contribute to how these people – some young, some old – are thinking and behaving. I realise this is an extreme example. There are lots of other things that we dislike without them being an explosive statement of discontent, although I suspect that many of the things we don't like arise out of others being discontented with what they have.

Of course, music is a wonderful example of the, 'I don't like it,' mentality we find in the church. I don't like the guitar. I don't like the organ. I don't like drums. I don't like hymns. I don't like modern songs. You know what I mean. Then you have the, 'I don't like chairs in rows, I don't like chairs in a curve, I don't like handouts, I don't like the PowerPoint.'

Here's a different way of approaching things. What if, instead of banging on about not liking something, I instead learn to appreciate it. I learn to see what others like about it. Then I love them and support them in their space. We do that with family all the time and on the occasions we forget, we see the consequences all too quickly.

With all that in mind I absolutely love God saying – 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' We could rephrase it as - 'All that stuff you like, the music, the art, the proper behaviour, it has nothing to do with what is important. What I, God, think is important, is very different to all of your ideas and preferences.' What I, Andrew, find myself wondering is how often we set out to thwart God's plans because they make us feel uncomfortable. I am very aware that in the past I have had moments when I have been sure God is asking me to do something and I have said, 'No,'

because I simply didn't want to go there. For the most part I don't know what I might have missed out on, but I do know that God only desires the very best for my future. So...

God chose the foolish, the weak, the low and the despised, the things that are not to reduce to nothing all our strength and wisdom. How do I, how do we deal with that? In all honesty, I don't know. None of this being Christian gig is simple or straightforward. I stand up here on a Sunday and preach what I think is what God wants me to preach and then go home wondering if anything I said was more than hot air, giving my ill-educated opinion on things I know little about. I don't say that for sympathy, I say it because I know without a shadow of doubt that at best I can only scratch at an itch I mostly can't reach. Anything that connects with people has to be God at work through the Holy Spirit. In the end my hope is that I can be one of the foolish, the weak, the low and despised that God uses to explain his wisdom. Not because I like it. Not because it makes me feel comfortable. Because that is how God blesses each one of us. That makes it totally worth it!

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

Reading Matthew 5:1-12 (The Message)

¹⁻² **W**hen Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside.

Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him.

Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

³ "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

⁵ “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

⁶ “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

⁷ “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

¹⁰ “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

^{11–12} “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Reflection

The sermon on the mount is nothing if not challenging. Who here feels blessed when you are at the end of your rope? Who feels blessed when you have lost what is most dear to you? The truth is that there are myriad sermons that try to break these apparent blessings down and make us feel better about them. Of course, Jesus had our very best in mind as he was saying these things. Of course, they make sense and describe a good way to live. But don’t go around trying to tell me that it’s all sunshine and roses here. Some of this stuff sucks. Some of it feels like fantasy – the sort of thing you read in a book about a Proverbs 31 mother with 14 children who has time, and money, to get her nails done every Friday, keeps the house spotlessly clean and welcomes her husband at the door every day with a big hug and comfy slippers. And other myths and legends.

I chose this version of the reading because it makes it a little easier to understand what Jesus may have been getting at. But even here, some of it is pretty tough to wear. Then I got thinking about something I said last week. About being gentle with myself. And here is where I think it begins to make

some sense. I don't know about you, but I read something like this and there is a strong temptation to say, I can't do all this, so I just won't try. It's too big, too hard to contemplate. I forget the wisdom that says I don't have to do it all at once. If I can just nudge the dial a little on one of these things then I will be in a better space. Maybe I can't deal with the idea that being at the end of my rope makes for less of me and more of God. But I can work up the energy to care, just a little. Or perhaps my mind and heart are all over the place, but I can work up a small appetite for God right now. These little bits here or there each move me a tiny amount. At each step something, often something tiny changes in me and I take a small step toward Christ.

This is where I need to be gentle with myself. I don't need to do it all at once. Truth is I likely can never do it all anyway. So I do what I can, when I can. It will likely look wonky from the outside – some things will develop easily, others I will likely struggle with to the day I die. Some people may see me as unbalanced and needing to work on one thing in particular. But here I am being gentle on myself by saying that is between me and God.

There are so many directions we could take this, and so little time. Rather than try to cover all the possibilities I want to zero in on just one thing. "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for." This simple idea covers so much of life and because it does it can feel overwhelming. What is it that I have to care for? Everything? How do I do that? Do I have to care for the whales and the kakapo, the flooding in the Hawkes Bay and the starving millions in Ethiopia, for the economic collapse of Argentina and the ongoing war in Syria, for the women in Afghanistan and the gang warfare in El Salvador? The list is endless and I only have so much care to go around. And that's without caring for myself, something that can feel like a full time job on its own much of the time.

Maybe, if I'm gentle with myself I start by caring for what I can manage. A lot of me, a little of the other stuff. Then I might get a bit better at caring for me and find some more care that I can share around. It's not an instant fix, it's a long, slow process that will take the rest of my life. I could start to get proactive about being full of care. I could ask myself each day...

1. How am I going to care for me today?
2. How am I going to care for something else today?

We could get more complicated if we wanted to but I'm not sure I see the point. So, here's what I want to suggest. Everyone should have a pen and some paper nearby. You don't have to do this – you are most welcome to simply sit

and contemplate. I want to invite you to pause and think about that list of beatitudes. Think about which one you would like to put a little work into. Now, being gentle with yourself, answer those two questions I have named. They will obviously look different if you choose a different beatitude, but I'm sure you get the idea. I'll give you a few minutes to ponder and, if you like, write.

As we pray, allow the Holy Spirit to encourage you and gently build you up in Christ.

We Pray

Loving God, who holds us close and knows our thoughts, we rest with you. We are weak and foolish and need your loving arms around us. Help us, we pray, to be gentle with ourselves and to discover the blessing that comes from seeking to be a little more each day. We thank you for caring for us through our struggles and in our successes. It is amazing to be able to carry your love with us no matter where we go or how we feel. Fill us with your Holy Spirit we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

Let all creation

Paul Zach, Andy Zipf

Let all creation sing before the Lord
and every nation of the earth rejoice,
let all the trees lift a shout of joy
for the Lord is King.

Let the deep waters of the sea resound,
let every mountain, every hill sing out,
let all the fields make a joyful sound
for the Lord is King.

Mighty river, barren desert,
howling wind and stormy weather,
every canyon every valley,
sing your praise and give him glory.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

Every star and constellation,
every wonder in the heavens,
silver moon and supernova,
sing a shining hallelujah!

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

Honey bees and weeping willows,
grizzly bears and armadillos,
every narwhal and sea otter,
every son and every daughter.

Nature proclaims the glory of our God,
nature proclaims his name.

La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord
La la la la la la - All the earth, praise the Lord

Offering

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

God of all blessings, Jesus teaches all we need to know to claim the life you've hoped for us. Yet we live like the rest of the world, eager to accumulate and reluctant to give, showering adoration on the rich and powerful and pushing away the poor and powerless. As we bring to you our gifts, the result of your blessings, help us to remember who Jesus called truly blessed! We pray in the name of our teacher and Saviour. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

For the people of Ukraine, caught up in a war, not of their own making. The daily struggle to maintain some kind of normality, if that is even possible.

Through our prayers teach us to--

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

For people whose lives have been shattered by catastrophic weather events this year, from Cyclone Gabrielle to snow storms in the US to famine inducing droughts in Africa.

Through our prayers teach us to--

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

For the people of nations on the brink of economic and financial collapse. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Venezuela, Argentina, Turkey, South Africa, the list seems endless as economic mismanagement and corruptions destroys lives and livelihoods.

Through our prayers teach us to--

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

For our leaders, wrestling with the impossible task of keeping people satisfied and moving forward together. Political leaders, church leaders, community leaders, each bringing agendas, their own, their party's or groups, seeking the best while others do what they can to sabotage their efforts.

Through our prayers teach us to--

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

For ourselves, living as best we can through what can seem to be chaos. For our family and friends, our pets and our places. For our hopes and our dreams as we wonder about what the future holds.

Through our prayers teach us to--

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

All these things we pray through Jesus, our Lord, who taught us to 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

Will your anchor hold

Priscilla J. Owens

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rage, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow?

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil.

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we revel in our weakness and foolishness knowing that little by little God is transforming us, hearts and minds, as children of God and co-heirs with Christ.

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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