

Creationist 2.0

Creating Is Seeing

19 March 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 23

GOD, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.

**You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.**

True to your word, you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.

**Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.**

Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

**You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.**

You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.

**Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of GOD for the rest of my life.**

And can it be

Charles Wesley

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Why did you design us to get old, God?
Hearing gets so much harder
Forever adjusting the hearing aids
Seeing gets so much harder
Glasses and operations and still it gets worse
Walking gets so much harder
The ignominy of canes and walking frames
Living gets so much harder
Harder to prepare meals
Harder to tidy the garden
Harder to simply get through the day
And let's not talk about sleeping, or not
Losing our independence is the ultimate indignity
How do we find you in the midst of this, God?
How do we find peace and hope
 when it seems life is fighting us at every turn?
Remind us to, 'Be still and know that you are God.'
Remind us of, 'your steadfast love, O God'
Remind us to, 'fear no evil, for you are with us.'
Remind us that, 'goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.'
Forgive us for losing sight of your goodness and mercy.
We bring our private confessions to you now...

Our Saviour Christ, came with peace. "Peace for those who were near, and peace for those who were far off. " The peace and wonder and joy of Christ Jesus be always with you. Amen

The Peace

Reading 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Reflection

What do you see?

Paddock

Wood

Flour

Wool

Eveline

What we see around us is individual to us. Our view on the world is utterly unique – your view is different to mine, to your partner or best friend, to your neighbour, to anyone and everyone. When I display an image on screen, whether it is a flower or a complex design or even a plain white sheet we all see that image differently. Some people will see the colour, some the shape, some the frame, some the background. Our perceptions of shape and colour and background will all be different. The colourblind will see something different to everyone else. The engineer will see differently to the architect, the chef to the baker, the dog owner to the cat owner.

Let's use me as an example. Some people think I am too casual. Others love that I am relaxed. Some think my guitar playing is wonderful. Others look forward to the moment I put the guitar down. Some enjoy my sense of humour. Others find it annoying. Some find my focus on questions rather than answers invigorating while others are frustrated because I don't tell them what they should think. None of those opinions and feelings are wrong. None of them are perverse or unreasonable. I might like some and not like others, but they are held by individuals who have every right to feel they way they do. Even if I disagree with their reasoning or their conclusions I will completely defend the fact that they see the world the way they do and that is a part of who they are. For the most part I don't even want you to change your mind, although I pray you are always open to gentle prods to think differently, more broadly, more easily.

All of which is a brief introduction to Samuel's trip to Bethlehem. Samuel arrived with a boatload of preconceptions about what a king might look like. Saul was tall, powerful, brash, outgoing. He was a strong leader of strong men. He commanded respect and leadership rested easily on his shoulders. He was the epitome of what a king should be like. At least, that is how it seemed on the outside. We know from reading the Bible stories that on the inside he was torn and conflicted, fearful and full of resentment and anger.

Let me ask you a question. Is your outside appearance the same as what is going on inside? Do you feel exactly the same as you act? I know I don't. I often feel unsure, insecure, even depressed at times. And I do my best to not let on to most people because I am afraid to be 100% real. I think I am pretty normal in that respect. So when someone looks at me and says, 'I think you are... fill in the blank,' and they are correct I get worried that somehow I might have let my guard down. And fearful they might even read my darkest secrets that I don't even like to admit to myself. I'm going to go out on what I suspect is a pretty safe limb here and suggest that pretty much everyone is like that.

With that in mind, here comes Jesse with his sons. The eldest, Eliab is of course the first in front of Samuel. 'Ahh,' says Samuel, 'now here is a fine specimen. He must be the one. He is tall and strong. He looks like a leader of men. I think he would make an excellent king.'

'Not so fast, Samuel. You see, the problem here is that you look with your physical eyes and see the silhouette of a good king. But silhouettes can be deceiving. The shadows hide so much more than they reveal.'

Short Silhouettes clip

The silhouettes are amazing, but they hide the people who form them, the depth is lost in the shadow. So Samuel moves to Abinadab, then Shammah and four other of Jesse's sons. Each one is passed over because the inner man is not what God is looking for in a king. It would seem there is no-one left. 'God, have you sent me on a fool's errand?' No, there is one left, the youngest. He too is strong and handsome. The difference is that his heart is for God. Oh, we know he is not perfect. He has his inner demons, many of which we see as time passes. But, and this is a huge but. His heart is to please God.

This is where all the opinion and preferences cease to matter. What you think about me, what I think about you is overcome by our heart for God. That's not something that can be easily hidden. Is your desire to please God? That is what will, in the end, overcome all your inner demons. It reminds me of Joshua who, at the end of his life, told the people of Israel, 'Choose who you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' That is the heart God is looking for.

He is exalted

Twila Paris

He is exalted

The King is exalted on high

I will praise Him

He is exalted, forever exalted

And I will praise His name

He is the Lord

Forever His truth shall reign

Heaven and earth

Rejoice in His holy name

He is exalted

The King is exalted on high

Be exalted

I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the people.

I will sing praises to Thee among the nations.

For Thy steadfast love is great, is great to the heavens;

And Thy faithfulness,

Thy faithfulness to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;

Let Thy glory be over all the earth.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;

Let Thy glory be over all the earth.

Reading

John 9:1-12

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they

kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

Reflection

I think this is one of my favourite Jesus stories. The levels of irony and sarcasm are unmatched in the rest of Scripture. It’s probably fortunate we don’t have time to dig into the whole story so I encourage you to read the rest when you go home and have a good laugh at the expense of the Pharisees.

Let’s begin with the disciple’s question, ‘Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind.’ The question speaks to a problem of sight that afflicts most of the human race. We are desperate to apply our personal standards to everyone we see. Skin colour is an obvious example of how we humans apply certain preconceptions and expectations to people who look different to us.

Have no doubt – you might look down on someone who looks different to you, and you can be sure that for the most part they feel similarly toward you.

Gender is another glaring example of how people assign particular expectations on others for no other reason than they are not the same. How about religion, or training, or money, or how long you have lived in some small town.

The disciples saw a blind man and immediately made assumptions about who he was and how he came to be without a shred of interest in the facts of the matter. For the first thing, how had the man sinned if he was born blind. Was it sin after the fact. Did he sin before he was born? Super dumb question and driven by cultural and religious assumptions with no thought applied. That is multiple sermons all on its own, but we won’t go there today because I want to focus in, not on the blind man seeing, but on what Jesus saw.

I think Jesus saw a completely different scene when he looked at the man who had been blind from birth. He looked straight past the surface and grasped the pain of someone who had been ostracised from society and lived on the edge, barely surviving from day to day. Dependent on others for nearly everything his life would have been far more difficult than someone born blind in New Zealand today. There were no Blind Societies and white canes and audio signals and braille text. There was no financial support beyond family and friends helping out as they could. And then there was the treatment by those who thought his condition was due to sin – whether his or another’s.

What is amazing is that Jesus kept looking, past the pain, past the indignity and saw a different future for this man. A future where he could see and stand up for himself. Likely still a difficult future, but one in which he had more control over his personal circumstances. Like Michelangelo many centuries later, Jesus looked at a flawed object and saw the beauty of what it could become.

It is this, I think, that makes us different to every other creature on earth. And it is the lack of the ability to see the beauty below the surface that leads to racism and sexism and ageism and every other 'ism' you might care to name.

Let me rephrase that. It is not a lack of ability. I believe every human being has the ability to look beyond, to look deeper, to see the creator in the other.

Unfortunately it is an ability that is frequently suppressed, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes deliberately.

This is our challenge. We all, me included, have blind spots, areas where we choose not to see beyond. Not long ago I was doing something and I recognised a blind spot in me, an attitude toward some other people that meant I was unable to truly appreciate them as God has made them. It made me mean and spiteful toward those people. (always to myself, but what is on the inside frequently makes its way to the outside – we need only look at Saul and at David's brothers to know that.) So I am purposefully working on my attitude. I don't think it will change quickly, but I am determined it will change. You might wonder why I would bother – as long as I don't let it all out then no-one will know. But here's the question. What other things in other people do I have an attitude about that is holding me back from seeing their God-given beauty? What do I miss out on from not seeing that beauty? What might they miss out on because of my bad attitude? God has created me to be a creator. If I am being like Samuel or the disciples and not seeing past the surface then what poor choices might I make. I would rather be like Jesus and see beyond the scraggly, messy, confused lives in front of me into the beauty that God has placed in every person.

It seems to me that when I start to do that, to look beyond my prejudices and opinions and see the beauty God has created I not only become a better person, I begin to create new and wonderful things and ideas in the world around me. And that is just plain exciting. What do you think?

We Pray

God who looks past our outsides and into our insides, thank you for truly seeing us and not turning away. You know our deepest secrets, our darkest thoughts. You know our hearts, how we are so often conflicted and filled with contradictory thoughts and ideas. And still you don't turn away. You look, you see deep into us and you love us and find the beauty in us that often even we don't know is there. Help us to be people who look past the surface of those around us and discover the beauty you have placed in every person. Help us too, to discern when we can be a part of drawing that beauty closer to the surface. Teach us to see and in seeing to create good things in our lives and in the lives of everyone we meet. Amen.

Jesus, we enthrone you

Paul Kyle

Jesus, we enthrone You
We proclaim You are king
Standing here, in the midst of us
We raise You up with our praise

And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
Come Lord Jesus and take Your place

Offering

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

Generous God, you tenderly care for each person you have created. You miraculously restore people to health and shine light into the lives of those who are discouraged. Guide us so that we will not regard others according to outward appearances but seek to find your love in their hearts. We dedicate our offerings and ourselves to contribute to the work of your kingdom on earth until Christ returns in glory. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Colin Harvey

Let us pray for all God's children.

Within this house of prayer, loving God, where we are refreshed by living water of your Spirit, we turn our prayers towards the hungers and thirsts of the wider world.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

Enter the experience of all who this day are looking for a faith which will enable them to turn around the defeat and shame of their present story.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

Enter the grief and misery of folk who have found that no human friend or loved one is able to reach the lonely depths of their sorrow.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

Enter the insecurity of those desperate seekers who rush from one religion to another, and from one counsellor to another.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

Enter the strength of self-made people who privately are driven by an unnameable discontent which makes them irritable and hard to live or work with.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

Enter the despair of all whose land or jobs, homes or health, freedom or reputation, have been taken from them.

With the fullness of Christ's grace,

Flow waters, flow with healing grace.

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

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!

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we open our eyes and our hearts to the hidden
beauty God has placed in every person around us...

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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