

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating is Community*

30 April 2023

### Call to Worship – Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.**

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.**

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

**you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

**and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.**

### All Creatures of Our God and King

*W H Draper*

All creatures of our God and King,  
Lift up your voice and with us sing  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,  
Thou silver moon with softer gleam,  
O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,  
Ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,  
O praise him, alleluia!

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,  
Ye lights of evening, find a voice,  
O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless,  
And worship him in humbleness,  
O praise him, alleluia!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,

And praise the Spirit, three in one,  
O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Sometimes I get grumpy, God  
It feels like nothing is going my way  
The weather is wrong  
The meetings are tiring  
Even the words are hard to find  
I just want to complain and make it all go away

And then I realise  
If it all goes away  
I start thinking it is all because of me  
I am so good that I don't need you, God  
What a disastrous mistake that would be  
You are a part of all I do  
Even when I cannot see you or feel you  
You watch out for me  
Ready when I fall  
Waiting for me to reach out to you

Teach me to notice you  
When things are going well as much as  
When they seem to be falling apart around me  
Craft in me a desire to find you in all things  
To be at peace with you  
No matter the chaos I find around me

We bring our private confessions to God

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus  
Our God fulfils his promises and is true to his word  
We are forgiven because Christ died for us

### The Peace

## Reading

Acts 2:42-47

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

### *Life among the Believers*

<sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## Reflection

I grew up in church at the height of the Charismatic movement. John Wimber was the flavour of time and healing miracles, being slain in the Spirit and various other miraculous occurrences were simply part of how things happened. We hunted for opportunities to test our faith – usually on the unsuspecting and were jubilant when our hunt led us to a new victim, sorry, Christian believer. We scoured the Scriptures for hints on how to perform miracles and devoured books on the topic. Healing meetings were de rigueur and camps where we focussed on praying in the Spirit, prophecy and speaking in tongues were the height of excitement. It was a heady time and I made many friends and learnt all sorts of things in the process.

Acts 2 was, of course, a favourite reading. See all the miracles that were performed that clearly led to lots of people being saved. We simply needed to do communion, pray and perform miracles and we would emulate the early church as the Lord added to our number.

Problem is, I think we missed the point. As I read this story of the early church today and then reflect on my experiences in the 80s, I have this nagging suspicion that for all our energetic focus on signs and wonders it had little, perhaps nothing to do with those being added to our number. A brief glance at this reading will tell you that the main focus is not about signs and wonders. It is about how a community came into being and how it was learning to behave. It was a community that learnt together, ate together, prayed together, worshiped together. It was a community who shared together, who gave together and connected with the wider community together. This reading is about community.

As I look back to my church in the 80s I have realised that the reason we grew wasn't about the signs and wonders. It was about the community to which we belonged. It was a welcoming community. There were all sorts of people there – smart, highly trained people, hardworking, hard drinking labourers, family people, single people, people with a history of crime, people who wouldn't know how to do crime if they fell over it. Everyone gathering together and growing together.

Out of that community came some incredible creativity. Dance and drama and artwork were one aspect. A community-based foodbank that became a model for the rest of the country another. Significant numbers of young men and women became ministers and pastors out of that time. People went on short and long mission trips both overseas and locally. All kinds of community support activities grew up out of people's dreams and became realities, changing lives forever.

Now, don't get me wrong. There were a lot of mistakes and screw-ups along the way as well. Some of the things that were done and said were heartbreakingly sad and hurtful. There were people who were so hurt they left the church and would likely never return, even in some instances becoming actively anti-church. Although I think in balance the good outweighed the bad quite substantially, the bad was sometimes pretty terrible.

Of course, the temptation is to then say that if something goes wrong, if mistakes are made then the whole thing is flawed. I want to say that all of human endeavour is flawed. We don't, and never will, get everything right. That goes for the church as much as it goes for everything else in life. So what is the solution?

I think – my opinion only – that we have to learn to be really, really good at making mistakes, at failing. Not in the sense that we want to make mistakes but because the alternative is to not do anything at all. There is the saying that the art of a good wood worker is not to be mistake free but to know how to fix your mistakes. Our reading today doesn't mention it, but I can guarantee, with 100% confidence that there were a lot of mistakes going on in that early church. There would have been fights and fallings out, things said then regretted, actions taken then regretted, choices made then regretted.

The true power of community consisted in coming together before, during and after all the failures and mistakes, working them through and then getting up and keeping going. If we can relearn the art of making mistakes in community

and how to work through them and keep going I am confident that day by day the Lord will add to our number. Will it be easy and straightforward? Not at all. It will likely be frustrating and infuriating. People will want to stop the train and get off. People will get mad at each other. People will be disappointed. People will be hurt. And a strong community works through all that. It works through the anger, it supports through the disappointment, it makes amends and forgives through the hurt.

Whenever we share communion together we proclaim we are members of a community that reflects the work of Christ in our lives. Part of that reflection means owning our mistakes, not in fear, but in recognition that as humans we frequently fail and that our relationship with Jesus and with each other means we have a means of support to get up and keep going. What creative mistakes are you going to make this week? 😊

## 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

## 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

John 10:1-10

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

## Reflection

If community requires an ability to make mistakes it also requires a safe space for mistakes to be made. If the response you get every time you make a mistake is to be yelled at and treated as if you are a dastardly sinner, you will likely take one of two paths. The first is to give the middle finger to the yeller and go your own way. If this is how I am going to be treated I want nothing to do with you or your belief system. The second is to shut down and do nothing at all, aiming to float gently along beneath the notice of the self-righteous who are poised ready to pounce with their pronouncements of sin and death.

I would like to suggest, probably as one in a long line of people making the same suggestion, that the self-righteous are often the ones Jesus is referring to as thieves and bandits. They make themselves out to be the worthy ones, holding each other in high esteem while looking down on the lowly sheep who clearly don't know right from wrong. I'm going to go a step further and suggest that most of us here have probably been numbered among the self-righteous more than once throughout the years. That's not necessarily because we set out to be self-righteous. It's more because when we decide we like or prefer a particular way of doing things it is all too easy to insist that others have to go along with our preferences.

This is where I think it begins to get interesting. Jesus tells us that the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. It is a habit of the church to instantly

brand things like stealing and killing and destroying as things of the devil. We are very clear that the thief is the devil and so we are absolved of responsibility. But what if the thief is me whenever I insist that I am righteous and everyone must follow in my footsteps? I may do that consciously, as we have seen various cult leaders over the years insist their followers do exactly what they are told. Or I might be more subtle about it, never raising my voice but quietly insisting that things should be done my way. I might refuse to attend services where a woman is preaching. Or explain how the music is not to my liking – on a regular basis. Or tell the teenagers they can't dress in a certain way, either directly, or by my looks and overloud pontificating about the youth of today. I could extend the list of ways in which we practice self-righteous behaviour, often without realising it, for quite some way. And the question then becomes, are we the thieves and bandits Jesus is talking about? Have we stolen and killed and destroyed the hope of others because we want what we like and insist on others following along? I am quite sure I have been guilty of that more than once over the years.

What then, does Jesus do or say that gives us a way through this morass of ill-behaved conceit? I do like how Jesus doesn't insist on the sheep being remade in his image. He sees them as individuals who will follow his voice by choice. I think he understands that the sheep, as they follow along, will find their way, drawing ever nearer to his voice because that is where they find peace and hope. Some of them are still going to go and get lost in the wilderness. I'm sure there are those that constantly seem headed in the wrong direction. But who is to say what the wrong direction really is? Perhaps they will find the best grass because they are heading on paths less travelled.

And here is maybe the best thing of all. They follow the only one who won't put them wrong. Who won't insist on them doing things exactly one way. Who will gently help them up when they stumble. Who will call them by name. Who will love them and search for them no matter what strife they find themselves stumbling into. What an incredible community to be a part of. There is a freedom to fall over, to make mistakes and find support in the midst of those mistakes. There is encouragement and praise for the stumbling steps of those learning to walk. Challenges and reassurance for those stepping into the unknown. In a place like this there is a creativity that knows only the bounds of the love of God and the love of those around us. That sounds like a pretty amazing place to be.

I am going to pray in a moment. First, I want to invite you to ponder your mistakes. Forgive where forgiveness is needed. Think how those around you supported you through your mistakes. Consider how you can support others in their mistakes. Think about how that might lead to you and others becoming more creative in life and in church. Becoming

### We Pray

God who sees us. God who sees me. God at work in my life, in our lives through Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. We invite you to enter our moment and gently call us into your safe space.

We confess we are a mistake prone people. As individuals and as a community. Gift us with the insight to see our faults, to accept them, to forgive them, and in doing so to accept and forgive the faults in others. Where we fail, enable us to receive the acceptance and forgiveness of those around us.

Enable us to become a community that is added to daily through the miracle of living as the hope-filled people of God. Through Jesus, who calls us to follow. Amen.

### Just let me say

*Geoff Bullock*

Just let me say how much I love You  
Let me speak of Your mercy and grace  
Just let me live in the shadow of Your beauty  
Let me see You face to face  
And the earth will shake as Your Word goes forth  
And the heavens can tremble and fall  
But let me say how much I love You  
O my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Just let me hear Your finest whispers  
As You gently call my name  
And let me see Your power and Your glory  
Let me feel Your Spirit's flame  
Let me find You in the desert  
'Til this sand is holy ground  
And I am found completely surrendered  
To You, my Lord and friend

So let me say how much I love You  
With all my heart I long for You



For I am caught in this passion of knowing  
This endless love I've found in you  
And the depth of grace and forgiveness found  
To be called a child of God  
Just makes me say how much I love You  
Oh my Saviour, my Lord and friend

## Offering

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

Caring and compassionate God, we feel like we have been through so much. Battered by division, perceived by some as too judgmental and by others as too accommodating, and we know our witness to the world has suffered. Bless the gifts we give and help them to be used to sow seeds of kindness, healing, hope, and justice. When we as a church falter, remind us that Christ, our Good Shepherd, never falters. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

*Ideas from a prayer by Katy Stenta - <https://revgalblogpals.org/2022/06/30/remembering-to-breathe-a-prayer/>*

God

There is so much to pray about  
Wars and rumours of wars  
Economic devastation waged on the poor  
The cries of the ill – physically and mentally  
The call of the hungry – here and far off  
The sadness of the forgotten  
The fear of the weak  
The worry of the confused and lost  
We are overwhelmed with the sheer magnitude of all that needs prayer  
Holy Spirit, intercede for us when we run out of words  
See our hearts and speak for us as we breathe in your presence

God help us (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

Jesus walk with us (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

Holy Spirit comfort us (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

God...breathe with me (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

Jesus... breathe with me (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

Spirit...breathe with me (*breathe in*)

**There is so much (*breathe out*)**

Amen (*breathe in*)

**Amen (*breathe out*)**

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

### Rejoice the Lord is King

*Charles Wesley*

Rejoice, the Lord is King,

Your Lord and King adore;

Mortals, give thanks and sing

And triumph evermore:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.

Jesus, the Saviour reigns,

The God of truth and love:

When He had purged our stains

He took His seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail;

He rules o'er earth and heav'n;

The keys of death and hell

Are to our Jesus giv'n:

Rejoice in Glorious Hope,

Jesus the Judge shall come;

And take his Servants up

To their Eternal Home:

We soon shall hear th' Archangel's Voice,  
The Trump of GOD shall sound, Rejoice.

### Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we live as the community of Christ, forgiven and forgiving as we find our hope in Jesus...

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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