

# Creationist 2.0

## *Creating Goes Deeper*

14 May 2023

### Call to Worship – Psalm 66

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.**

Come and hear, all you who fear God,

**And I will tell what he has done for me.**

Truly God has listened;

**He has given heed to the words of my prayer.**

### King of Glory, King of Peace

*Herbert/Walker*

King of Glory, King of Peace I will love thee;

And that love may never cease, I will move thee.

Thou hast granted my request, thou hast heard me;

thou didst note my working breast, thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art I will sing thee,

and the cream of all my heart I will bring thee.

Though my sins against me cried, thou didst clear me;

and alone, when they replied, thou didst hear me.

Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee;

in my heart, though not in heaven, I can raise thee.

Small it is, in this poor sort to enrol thee;

e'en eternity's too short to extol thee.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

The autumn's leaves are mostly on the ground

Left there they form a damp carpet

The perfect home for worms and bugs

Preparing the soil for winter then spring

Cleaning up the detritus of summer

Laying down natural fertiliser

I wonder where those worms go

When we clean away the leaves

In an effort to maintain our perfect lawns

I wonder if our efforts to keep our piece of the world

Neat and tidy

Hinder the natural creating of God at work

I wonder if we do that in other parts of our lives

Cleaning up, sorting out,

Getting rid of anything that gets in the way

Of how we like life

I wonder if sometimes God despairs

At our unwillingness to let

God stuff get in the way of Me stuff

I wonder...

We confess we are often selfish in how we approach life. It can become all about what I can get rather than what I can share. God, teach us to be willing to let your stuff get in the way of our stuff a little more often.

We bring our private confessions before God...

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

The Peace

Notices

**Gently Tending Grief** – a day retreat in Moeraki with the Rev. Dr. Hilary Oxford Smith and harpist, Julie Saraswati. When someone we love dies, our lives change forever. Navigating the experience and process of grief can be challenging and bewildering as we gradually transition to a different way of living. This day away offers a welcoming, safe and supportive space to come together with others who are grieving and be refreshed, encouraged, comforted and strengthened in mind, body and spirit. To find out more and to register, go to <https://spiritofbradan.com/retreats-and-workshops/gently-tending-grief-2/>.

## Reading Acts 17:22-30

<sup>22</sup> Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup> For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup> From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup> so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup> For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

<sup>29</sup> Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.

<sup>30</sup> While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

## Reflection

Most of you will be familiar with the KISS principle. Standing for Keep it Simple, with any S word you care to append, the idea is that the best solution to most problems is usually simple. It’s not always the case, but it’s a good rule of thumb. What KISS doesn’t account for how we get to SIMPLE. It can often be deeply complicated and require a profound understanding of the mechanisms involved in getting to the solution. On a, dare I say simple level, an example of this could be the baking of a cake. The recipe might be for a cake of a certain size. Should I want to bake a cake twice the size I cannot merely double the recipe. The chemistry involved means that quantities have to be adjusted differently – perhaps more flour and less liquid, that sort of thing. The simple quickly becomes more complicated unless you understand the basic mechanics of cake baking. For those who are competent bakers it is very simple. For the rest of us, who barely know a ladle from a whisk, it is not so simple. We are the reason we have recipes. You smart bakers don’t need them.

How about an example from my house. I had to replace some rotten weatherboards before the painter came through and painted the house. Apart

from some videos I had little idea what I was doing. The first couple of boards were a lesson in frustration and it took far more effort and a lot of mistakes and redos to get it done. As I went along, (and thanks to Derek who helped out and I think learnt as much as I did) I learnt some tricks and ways to do the job more easily. I don't think I ever got very good at it, but I was much better at the end than at the beginning. And with the experience and some thought given to the process it was much simpler by the time I got to the end than it had been in the beginning.

There's a saying among video gamers that goes, 'Get good, bro.' It is frequently repeated when a new player complains that a game is too difficult. It just means that if you want to do better, you have to work at it, practice, learn the craft – in other words, get good.

You have likely already worked out where I am going with this. Our Christian faith is like any other practice. We long for it to be simple. We look at men and women we respect both in the present and in history and we marvel at how they seem to practice a simple faith. It can all seem so easy, even in the midst of adversity, and we long to have a faith like theirs. Being human we look for easy ways of getting there. We search for recipes, and there are lots out there. You just need to read your Bible and pray every day. You should go on silent retreats. Find your thin place. Pray with others. Attend church every week. Attend homegroups. Make sure you keep up your giving. Donate to charities. Go on overseas mission trips. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Speak in tongues. Be baptised. The list of recipes is endless. Some people try them all and simply give up. Others look at all of them and give up before even trying them.

The problem is that people find a recipe that works for them, mostly in hindsight, I might add, and then suggest that all you need to do to 'get good' is follow the recipe. But the recipe was for them. It was particular to their experiences and circumstances. It worked for them because it was them working it. Then someone else comes along and, hoping to Keep It Simple, they try to follow the recipe. Sometimes it works, perhaps often enough for someone to write a book about it. It becomes a meme and everyone wants in on the latest and greatest way to 'get good' with God. All of which misses the point.

Every one here is different. Our life experiences are different. Our hopes and dreams are different. Our resources are different. Our recipes are different. If we want to 'get good' we need to find our own path and to do that we need to

work at it. Not to be like that person on TV or in the books on our shelves. To be the person God has created us to be. To do that we need to go deeper. We need to burrow into God and build and deepen our relationship with God.

I have a feeling this was the key problem the Athenians faced. Over the years they had built up a series of recipes of how they might communicate with God. But it had become an intellectual exercise instead of a personal relationship. They knew ABOUT God. They even had an altar for God. But they didn't KNOW God. As Paul acknowledges, they were searching for God, groping toward God, sometimes even finding God. By focussing on the recipe they had lost sight of the need to go deeper, to become a friend of God. And God wants more from all of us. More than simply following a recipe of going to church, praying, reading our Bibles, putting into the offering plate. God wants our hearts and that means going deeper. Deeper into relationship. Then, in relationship we begin to find that all the complexity begins to dissipate and the SIMPLE becomes obvious.

## In Christ alone

*Stuart Townend*

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe.  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save:  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied –  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain:  
Then bursting forth in glorious day  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine –  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand:  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

### Reading [John 14:15-21](#)

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup> “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

### Reflection

So, how do we go deeper without relying on someone else's recipes? I want to emphasise at this point that I am not trying to tell anyone how to do things. I want to suggest some things you might gather together to create your own recipe. I realise that it can be a frightening thing to have to step out on our own and make personal choices about how we are going to live. For some of us it is like a fish in water, easy and straightforward. For many it is more like a fish out of water. Small changes have us gasping and desperate to get back to the

familiar. All of which means we move at different speeds. Some don't need to be told any of this. They've worked it out for themselves, years ago. For others, it makes no sense, no matter how often they go through it. That's OK. God has made us different – praise God for that! If you don't understand, or don't want to understand, or can't see that point, that's totally OK. Hopefully you'll get something out of this anyway. If you want to understand and just find it a struggle, that's OK too – talk with a friend about it, ask me, talk with God about it. In the end the deepest part of the creativity God has baked into us is built around relationship. So, let's begin there.

Jesus begins with the words, 'If you love me.' Here is the first hint to how we can begin building our personal recipes. Underlying everything we are is a love relationship between us and God. Perhaps we don't hold up our end of the relationship very well. That's not the point. The point is that God loves us and longs for us to love in return. Now, remembering this is not a recipe, God's love looks different for every single individual. It is always filled up to the brim, flowing over, but that brim looks one way for you and another for me. God's love accounts for those variations and contrasts. It is the same for you and me. We love different people differently, focusing on those aspects of their nature that are uniquely theirs. Idea one here is that going deeper with God is founded in love.

Next up, Jesus tells us to keep his commandments. Now having already covered love, what does that mean? If we look at Jesus' response to the man who wanted to receive eternal life we see something very interesting. Jesus mentions only six commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honour your father and mother." He then follows it up with selling what the man owns and giving the money to the poor. Let's think about this for a moment. There's no mention of what you or I might call 'Spiritual' stuff. I had not considered this before and here is what I think we can take away from it. First up, James tells us that faith without works is dead. Perhaps what we are seeing here is that our behaviour is representative of our spiritual condition. In other words, what you do reflects what you believe. So if you say that you love God but display no love for the people around you – worked out in not murdering, not stealing etc., then the chances are you probably don't love God. Does that sound familiar? So, idea two about going deeper with God is that how we treat other people matters.

Which leads us to our next idea. Jesus asks the father to give us another Advocate, the Spirit of truth. My Cliff's Notes summary of this is that we can't

do it on our own. We need to have and acknowledge the person and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are to go deeper with God. Now before you leap up with a yes, but, I am not defining how this might look. For some people this might look like what happened with Cornelius and his household when the Holy Spirit came on the people listening to Peter. Or like on the day of Pentecost, with visible effect and speaking in tongues. For others it might be a quiet, barely discernible shift in who and how they are. There is no, 'One size fits all,' going on here. The Holy Spirit knows you intimately and knows how best to form a relationship with you. I think it is possible for the Holy Spirit to be so subtle that it is only in looking back over years that you realise a change has take place. That said, it is likely that others will notice the change much sooner. Our third idea is that when the Advocate, the Spirit, becomes a part of our lives we are given an ability to go deeper with God that we didn't have beforehand.

It would be easy to go on, giving ever more complicated ideas, building recipes that become so complex that only experts can determine how to make them work. I'm pretty sure that's not how God wants it to be. I think that if we take the ingredients of love, relationship with others, and the presence of the Holy Spirit we can create our own, very personal recipe for going deeper with God. I think that when we go deeper with God, when we, 'get good,' things begin to happen in our lives that we never could have imagined before.

### We Pray

Loving God, we know that we often only spend time with you on the surface. We don't go deeper because it seems too hard, too complicated, too much work. It's so much easier to float along, not making too much effort, never growing our relationship with you. And you keep on loving us, reaching for us, longing for us to go deeper with you. Help us to step into the deep with you, to find our own recipes for building a relationship with you that is wide as the ocean, high as the heavens and deep as the deepest sea. Through Jesus, who sent us the Advocate, we pray. Amen.

## O come to the altar

*Steven Furtick*

Are you hurting and broken within  
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin  
Jesus is calling  
Have you come to the end of yourself  
Do you thirst for a drink from the well  
Jesus is calling

O come to the altar  
The Father's arms are open wide  
Forgiveness was bought with  
The precious blood of Jesus Christ

Leave behind your regrets and mistakes  
Come today there's no reason to wait  
Jesus is calling  
Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy  
From the ashes a new life is born  
Jesus is calling

Oh what a Saviour  
Isn't He wonderful  
Sing alleluia, Christ is risen  
Bow down before Him  
For He is Lord of all  
Sing alleluia, Christ is risen

Bear your cross as you wait for the crown  
Tell the world of the treasure you've found

## Offering

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

Holy God and author of our existence; our story is part of a greater story, and your hand is visible on every page and every scene. So too our stories cannot be disconnected from those in the past who have shaped the steps we take – saints and sinners, rebels and followers. They are part of our story as we are part of theirs. As we offer gifts this day, we pray they might be used to strengthen the story of faith that will be told by those who will come after we are gone. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Prayer for Others and Ourselves

*Rev. Beth Richardson, Dean Emeritus of The Upper Room Chapel*

God makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. ...

God breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

God burns the shields with fire.

God says, "Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth."

*Psalm 46:9-10 (NRSV)*

God of peace,

Russia has invaded the Ukraine and war is upon them, and upon us.

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

God of wisdom,

Rain down your Spirit onto the leaders of the world

That they might find a way where there is no way.

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

God of comfort,

Wrap the grieving ones in your cloak of consolation.

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

God of courage,

Be present with all those who are in harm's way.

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

God with us,

Hear our prayers for ourselves, for those we love and hold dear,

For those who wrestle with the simple things of life

For the sick and the infirm.

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

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

## Love divine

*Charles Wesley*

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down:  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast;  
let us all in thee inherit,  
let us find the promised rest:  
take away the love of sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith, as its Beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be:  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
'til in heaven we take our place,  
'til we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

## Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we come to know how wide and high and deep the Father's love for us truly is...

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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