

Creationist 2.0

Creating Is Uncomfortable

11 June 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 33

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous.

**For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.**

Let all the earth fear the LORD;

let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;

he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The counsel of the LORD stands forever,

Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,

How deep the Father's love for us

Stuart Townend

How deep the Father's love for us,

How vast beyond all measure,

That He should give His only Son

To make a wretch His treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss –

The Father turns His face away,

As wounds which mar the Chosen One

Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,

My sin upon His shoulders;

Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice

Call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there

Until it was accomplished;

His dying breath has brought me life –

I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,

No gifts, no power, no wisdom;

But I will boast in Jesus Christ,

His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward?

I cannot give an answer;

But this I know with all my heart –

His wounds have paid my ransom.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Old shoes at the door

Favourites t-shirts, holed and stained

A coffee mug with stains and chips

The cosy chair worn down by years of sitting

New shoes are tight and uncomfortable

New shirts just don't feel the same

New mugs tell no stories

New chairs feel antiseptic and unloved

What is it about change that feels so hard?

What is it about moving on that seems to take so much energy?

I have a place for everything

I know where to find things

If it gets moved I will never be able to find it

I am independent

I can look after myself

If I admit I need help I might lose my identity

We fight so hard to keep what we have

We risk losing sight of what God has ahead of us

Forgive us God for being so inward looking

So determined to have things our way

Give us insight to see how we might grow in our faith

To learn to trust you more fully

We bring our private confessions to God

Truly we are blessed to be a blessing

God pardons us of our sin and sends us on our way

Forgiven because Christ died for us.

The Peace

Reading

Genesis 12:1-9

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Reflection

When I went to Melbourne earlier in the year I spent quite a lot of time researching all sorts of things about the city. I looked for events that would be on while I was there. I searched out interesting places to visit. I booked shows and trips. I talked to people who have been to Melbourne. I looked up websites that talked about different opportunities and ways to get around the city and beyond. By the time I got there I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to do and see. Of course, that was all done in by my catching Covid, but what I want to highlight is how much we can find out and know about literally anywhere in the world. We can find photos and stories and maps and guides – everything is at our fingertips. It means that when we arrive at our destination we are already focussed and raring to go. Add in the fact that although Melbourne is 2300km away it only takes around 4 hours to get there and travelling is a cinch.

Contrast that with Abram. God tells him to leave his country and his kindred and his father’s house and go to the land God will show him. That’s alright we say – plenty of people move away from home, even travelling overseas to live

and work and have a family. The difference is that in just a few hours we can be at their door to visit. They can easily fly home for birthdays or holidays. The other side of the world simply isn't that far away. It wasn't the same back then. If you wanted to get anywhere beyond your immediate neighbourhood, for the most part you walked. And when you are walking 2300km is a very long way. Now to be fair, Haran to Jerusalem is not as far – around 850km – but it is still a long way when you have to walk it. Given he had his family and flocks and was carrying his entire household they might have made 10 or 12km on a good day and they wouldn't have travelled every day. Averaged out, the chances are that the trip would have taken in the order of 6 months or more when you allow for rest days and things going wrong days and we should have turned left at the fork, not right, days. Short of a miracle, they were leaving and never going back.

In the end, they never did go back. They would never again see the family they left behind. They would never hear the familiar accents, see the familiar landmarks, smell the familiar scents of their homeland. It was all, in a very real way, dead to them.

I want to pause at this point and consider how that must have felt. They likely knew when they left that this was how it was going to be. The act of getting up and leaving was permanent and grief was inevitable. I hugged my sons before I left Palmerston North and experienced a pang of grief that I can only do that when I or they travel. That's nothing compared to how Abram and Sarai and their family would have felt. But here's the thing. Without leaving the safety and comfort of Haran, and Haran was a pretty good place to be. Without leaving that comfort and stepping out into the unknown they could never experience the amazing gifts God had to offer them. They would never see the incredible land flowing with milk and honey laid out before them. Staying in Haran would never be difficult. It was a place where they could experience success and be able to bring up a healthy family and engage profitably in business. There is no question that leaving Haran was a significant risk with no guarantee of success beyond God saying it was all a part of the plan.

I find myself wondering how many of us here would have the courage to do something similar. How many of us would be prepared to travel to a small, out of the way place we have never heard of and know nothing about? You know nothing about the people who live there, their language, their customs. Do they have places to shop? Is there clean water? Will my skills translate? What

about the schools? What is the medical situation? Now add the fact that you can never leave and head home once you get there. How many of us are brave enough? I know that there are some who have chosen to leave their homes for the other side of the world. One or two I have spoken to whose lived experience has some similarities to Abram and Sarai's story. I am in awe of the courage displayed in those circumstances.

The truth is that this is all high level, out of my comfort zone, stuff we're talking about. There is no denying that without this kind of risk taking the Bible story would have likely turned out very differently.

All of which brings us to now. To you and me and how we exercise our faith. It is one thing to move to the other side of the world because family are there or there is a job waiting, even the hope of a better job and life than where we are. It is very different when it is our very lives on the line, everything we are, everything we think about ourselves, everything that has contributed to who and how we are.

So, I want to ask a question. Are we living in Haran today? And is God calling us out of the comfort and certainty of Haran to the unknown, unknowable Canaan? I'm talking here about how we practice our faith, how we live as Christians. I have a suspicion I know some of the answer to that, but I cannot give the answer for all of us. God knew that Abram could be perfectly successful and happy in Haran. God also knew that Abram would struggle and make mistakes and do dumb stuff as well. Just like all of us, really. Our reality as Christians is that whether we like it or not we are on a journey from Haran to Canaan. The real question isn't whether we are called out of Haran, it is, "How willingly do we make the journey?" Our answer to that is a measure of how God can use us in the process. Are we passively aggressively resisting what God is trying to do in our lives? Are we kicking and screaming and dragging to get back to what is comfortable? Or are we accepting the change and the grief that comes with it to honour our calling as creative people of God? I can't answer that for you, it is a question we each need to own and find our answers with God.

Blessed be your name

Matt Redman

Blessed Be Your Name in the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow blessed be Your name
Blessed Be Your name when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord Still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be' blessed be Your name
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering blessed be Your name

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name

Reading Matthew 9:9-13

⁹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Reflection

I am going to be brief here. Creating is uncomfortable. When you sit with tax collectors and sinners, prostitutes and drug dealers, drunkards and fighters it can get messy and unpleasant, dare I say, uncomfortable. Worse, people who think of themselves as 'normal' will look at you sideways and complain about

the company you keep. Abram walked into the uncomfortable at God's call. Jesus walked into the uncomfortable as God's Son. I would like to suggest that just as Jesus created hope for the tax collectors and sinners, we are equally called to create hope for those very same people in our society. How are we doing that? How can we do it better? What do you think?

We Pray

God of sinners, God of the righteous, we acknowledge we are all sinners until you make us righteous through your Son. Forgive us for hiding in the comfort of our personal Haran's and avoiding the dangerous journey to Canaan you long for us to travel. Teach us to stretch into your call, not from a spirit of obedience, but for love. Create in us hearts filled with courage and hope through our relationship with Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Beneath the Southern Cross

Rev Catherine Burton and Rev Malcolm Gordon.

From the ends of the earth
We will sing; God is here, the kingdom is near
In the Land of the Long White Cloud
Christ to dwell, Immanuel

From north and south, from east and west
Beneath the Southern Cross we rest
Found by One who came for all
In this tale of spacious love we're born

This whenua on which we stand
This holy ground made by God's hand
Marred and scarred yet marked by grace
Held and healed in Christ we find our place

God of nations, at thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet
Strangers once, now called as one
Aotearoa, wake to greet this love

Offering

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

God of eternity and God of the next moment: we offer our gifts today having heard your call through Jesus to follow. Remind us again this day that being a follower doesn't end at the offering plate. There is a weight to this call – one that demands we not only say “yes” to following but that we also actively search for ways to live as disciples. Guide us walk surely in Abram's footsteps as we head for our Canaan. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Bruce and Yvonne

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C41sun12.htm>

For other people, close to us or far off, let us pray.

Wherever some have lost contact with reality, and suffer mental torments through every hour of each day.

Let your life come in its fullness, loving Healer.

Wherever some are at last breaking free and taking the first steps towards independence of mind and spirit.

Let your life come in its fullness, loving Encourager.

Wherever human beings are physically restrained but remain mentally tough and spiritually and mentally free.

Let your life come in its fullness, loving Inspirer.

Wherever they seek a reliable friend, or healer, comforter, adviser, teacher or a sure Redeemer.

Let your life come in its fullness, loving Counsellor.

Wherever people suffer the indignities of poverty, the loneliness of misunderstanding, or the crushing brutality of war;

Let your life come in its fullness, loving Saviour

Wherever the members of your church have traded liberty for legalism, or the living Truth for dogma, or trust for religious fears;

Let your life come in its fullness, loving God.

God of liberty, enable us to enter more completely in to the kingdom of love which has been waiting for us from the beginning of time.

Through Christ, in Christ, for Christ, we so pray. Amen!

Love came down at Christmas

Christina Georgina Rossetti

Love came down at Christmas,

love all lovely, Love divine;

Love was born at Christmas;

star and angels gave the sign.

Love left home and met us
Love so costly, love through time
Loved before we knew it
Christ the shepherd is the sign

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus,
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token;
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others,
love for plea and gift and sign.

[Benediction and Grace](#)

As we go on from here may we travel with confidence that grows from our call to follow 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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