

Creationist 2.0

Creating and the 'OTHER'

18 June 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 116

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he inclined his ear to us, we will call on him as long as we live.

What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

We will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

In the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

My chains are gone

John Newton, Chris Tomlin

Amazing grace how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now I'm found

Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free

My God, my Saviour has ransomed me

And like a flood His mercy reigns

Unending love, amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me

His word my hope secures

He will my shield and portion be

As long as life endures

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow

The sun forbear to shine

But God, who called me here below

Will be forever mine

Will be forever mine

You are forever mine

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Everything is on the move

Beetles scurrying through leaf litter

Birds flitting from branch to branch

People rushing from one appointment to another

Barely pausing to notice their surroundings

Intent on completing their task

Already focussed on the next

The world watches on

Patiently waiting to be seen

The single leaf hanging from a branch

The browning stalks of flowers still poking about the ground

Tiny hints of life urging spring to arrive in the depths of winter

Still, serene, strong, hopeful

Linger with us

Breathe in the moment

Tarry with us

Wait for God with us

Forgive us, God, for the way we busily ignore the beauty you have placed around us. We miss the sounds and scents of the earth. We miss the hearts of the people we move amongst. In our eagerness to complete our tasks we fail to see Jesus in the faces of those around us. Help us to slow in our race and observe you at work in us, through us, around us.

We bring our private confessions to God.

The God of all healing and forgiveness
draws us to himself and cleanses us from all our sins
that we may behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Peace

Notices

Reading

Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Reflection

Quick quiz. To what do the terms Orcs and Rashists refer? They are names given to Russian soldiers in the war in Ukraine. It is common in wartime to apply derogatory or dehumanising names to the people on the other side because it makes it easier to shoot at them. You see it too, in names for homeless people or people who live in caravans – trailer trash, bum, vagrant. All demeaning terms that let us think of these people as less than human and make it ok for us to look down on them. We do it when we talk about the people who live on, 'the other side of town,' or, 'over the tracks.' All because by making those people, 'other,' by making them less we can treat them in ways that we wouldn't treat a regular human being.

And before you say, 'Oh, I would never do that!' take a moment to consider the last time you saw someone doing something you were offended by? It could be as small as spitting on the pavement, or drawing graffiti on a wall, it could be young people loitering on a corner or driving an old car too fast. How did you talk about the offenders of your sensibility? I can't say for certain, but I'm fairly sure you used a word or name that made them less than Peter or Mary or John or Elizabeth. The truth is that with few exceptions it is a common human behaviour. We make people other so that when we condemn their behaviour we don't feel as though we are pointing one finger at them while three are pointing back at us.

It's also why we so struggle to get our heads around Romans 5:8. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. We could write that as, while we were still, 'OTHER', Christ died for us. While we weren't part of the family, while we

didn't belong in the tribe, while we didn't fit, while we behaved differently, Christ died for us.

But what does it mean for us to be Other? Most people listening to me have never truly experienced being Other. We might get a taste of it when we travel in non-Western countries. I know I have experienced the dislocating effect of being other in India and Guyana in particular where my skin colour and my language and accent set me apart from everyone around me. But for me that was simply a brief interlude where I was still readily accepted, for the most part, as a person who could kind of fit in even though I looked and sounded other. How different it might have been if I had not been welcomed. You may have your own stories of experiencing being other, if only for a little while. Some might have experienced it at school. Others in the workplace or having travelled or lived overseas. The problem is that we forget so quickly. So when it comes time to stand up for the Other we are more likely to stand with the familiar, the place we feel most comfortable. I suspect that most of the crowd baying for Jesus to be crucified was whipped up, not by any genuine worry or concern, but by the suspicion of Other that was thrown before them.

But wait, I was Other until God invited me to be part of the family. I was a part of the vast majority of humanity, still separate from God. And what makes me different now? Why am I no longer Other? It is because God made the first move. In Jesus, God came to earth, became immanent, God with us. Jesus experienced life as a human being. Then death as a human being.

That experience connected Jesus with us as more than simply the Word that brought everything into being. Jesus knew what it was like to be tired after a long day, to be hungry, to go without sleep, to have to press into God in the face of overwhelming sorrow and fear. Jesus became Other so he could invite me, you, to be a part of God's family. Think about that for a moment. Jesus cried out to God while he was on the cross. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' In that moment he was truly Other. Utterly and completely separated from God. Utterly and completely identified with you and with me. The invitation to move from being Other to become a part of God's family is given power through Jesus' experience of being Other. The Word who brought everything into being now identifies with being Other and so the invitation to come into God's family is not that of a Lord seating servants at a table. It is of a friend and companion sharing what they have with those who have less. That is pretty special!

Salvation belongs to our God

Pat Turner

Salvation belongs to our God
Who sits upon the throne
And unto the Lamb
Praise and glory
Wisdom and thanks
Honour and power and strength

Be to our God forever and ever
Be to our God forever and ever
Be to our God forever and ever, amen

And we the redeemed shall be strong
In purpose and unity
Declaring aloud
Praise and glory
Wisdom and thanks
Honour and power and strength

Reading Matthew 9:35-38; 10:5a, 7-8

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Reflection

I want to invite you to ponder this question. 'Who is Other to you?' It might seem like an odd question. You might think to yourself, there is no Other. I suspect that with a little thought you will realise that you have people who are Other to you. For some people it might be those who look different to them. Or it might be how other people behave. It could be those of a different political persuasion or with different religious views.

I was quite stunned to learn of the division between Catholics and Protestants on the West Coast at one stage in our history. I had never realised that kind of Other existed in New Zealand. But then I thought about it and realised that I sometimes feel Other when I walk into a church that is unlike anything I am familiar with, and even more so when I walk into a mosque or something similar. Or the time I was visiting a family in Southland. The lady had married into the area 30 years previously and although she didn't use the same words she still felt she was Other in the community. So I know we all experience both being Other and causing Otherness. I am just as guilty as the next person. Take a moment to think about who is Other to you. Share with your neighbour what you are thinking about.

I've been thinking a lot about where God is taking us as a church, both in the real and online. Over the last year we have been looking inward – Created to be Creators invites us in the first instance to think about who and how we are. About what it looks like to be created in God's image and the implications that has for how we live. It has been quite a journey for all of us and one that I have thoroughly enjoyed, hoping you have too. But if we leave it at that it is a bit like driving to the airport, going through check-in, waiting to board and then not getting on the plane. Or like gathering all the ingredients for a cake, mixing them together, turning on the oven, but not putting the mix into the oven to cook. In other words, we've not finished what we have set out to do.

Jesus took his disciples with him everywhere he went. They watched what he did, they had a go under his instruction and if everything had stopped there they likely would have gone home thinking that was all pretty cool, but so what? What's the point of everything we have seen and experienced? They would have stopped at the boarding gate and never got on the plane. But Jesus didn't stop there.

Jesus saw the crowds. He saw the Other, and he had compassion for them. I'm making this next bit up because it seems to fit everything else we know about the disciples. I suspect that they had not yet comprehended the Other all

around them. That's normal. We live in our context. Everything around us fits our context and so we don't notice much of what goes on around us. We often don't notice the Other unless they push themselves into our way. And when they do that, we get mad because that's not how we do things. We struggle to have compassion for the Other because we don't see them with Jesus' eyes. So, Jesus sent the disciples out. We're told it was 12 men, but I suspect there were more than that and more than a few of them were women. They are given specific instructions. I want to rephrase those instructions slightly. As you go, welcome each person you meet as a friend and someone who is invited to be a part of our family. Tell they are welcome because God loves them. Love them and help them with practical help – heal the sick, bring life where there is death, hope where there is despair, freedom where there is bondage. Invite the Other to become a part of God's family. Those instructions were for the disciples. They're instructions we can learn from and use to inform how we live too. I'm being careful how I say this because there is a risk to simply saying we should just follow Jesus' instructions. That is because our context is different. If I told you to go out to day and heal a few lepers you would rightly look at me as though I was a little (or a lot) mad. We don't have any lepers to go out and cleanse. Raising the dead is kind of cool, but for the most part when people die it's OK to leave them that way. All this to say that we need to learn from the instructions rather than seeking to follow them blindly. Ask yourself the question, 'What is the equivalent of leprosy in New Zealand today?' 'How do I participate in curing of the sick when most sickness is dealt with by health professionals?' Perhaps an even better question might be, 'How do I engage with, build relationship with and support the Other in my community?' I suspect that if we are disciplined in asking that question, in seeking out the Other, not to exclude them, but to welcome them into a warm and loving community that doesn't judge them or belittle them something else might happen. The question of who are the lepers, the demonised, the sick we are called to serve will become simply obvious. And something else will happen too. The population of Other will reduce, one by one, as they become a part of God's family. Now wouldn't that be cool!?!

We Pray

God of the Other. God, who in Christ came to be Other with us. Teach us to look beyond ourselves and to see those you love all around us. The Other who you long to have as family. The Other who will forever look different, sound different, be different, who you love and who you call us to love too. Gift us courage to move past our fear and our dislike and to become the loving and welcoming family you have called us to be. We know we're not much good at it and we need all the help we can get. Turn our eyes to Jesus and our hands to service so Others will find love and peace in your presence just as we have done. Through Jesus who came as Other to show us the way, we pray. Amen.

Good, good Father

Chris Tomlin

Oh, I've heard a thousand stories of what they think you're like
But I've heard the tender whisper of love in the dead of night
And you tell me that you're pleased
And that I'm never alone

You're a Good, Good Father
It's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are
And I'm loved by you
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am

Oh, and I've seen many searching for answers far and wide
But I know we're all searching
For answers only you provide
'Cause you know just what we need
Before we say a word

You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways to us

Oh, it's love so undeniable I, I can hardly speak
Peace so unexplainable I, I can hardly think

As you call me deeper still
As you call me deeper still
As you call me deeper still
Into love, love, love

Offering

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

Mighty God, with your powerful arms, hold up your church! We are struggling through tough times in our churches; we need to be renewed again and filled with your power. Reach inside us and open hearts wide that we might give the full measure of our devotion. As you revived the saints who came before us, revive us to go out and welcome the forgotten, heal the sick, speak the words of comfort and hope to the discouraged. In the holy name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Derek and Stef

God,

You are our refuge and strength,
You are the helper in all adversities.

We pray to You

For all who feel lonely:

Comfort them with the experience of your nearness.

For all who fear for their existence:

Open for them ways into the future.

For all of us:

Let us recognise more deeply what is really important in life.

We pray

Stand by all people who are affected by crises of many kinds.

Do not allow them to be paralysed by insecurity and fear.

Help us all

that mind and heart do not separate.

Let us all act prudently and responsibly.

Give us all serenity and a willingness to help and assist one another.

Strengthen among us all

the spirit of mutual respect, solidarity and mindfulness.

... and strengthen in us the faith

that you care for each one of us.

And often we forget to say THANK YOU.

THANK YOU

for your always open ear,

for your strong arm

for your kind heart,
for your endless love.

God,
YOU are the source of life. You are life.
YOU give us hope and comfort in difficult times.
We entrust ourselves and the whole world to you.
Amen

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

Praise to the Lord

Joachim Neander

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his altar draw near,
Joining in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, above all things so wondrously reigning;
Sheltering you under his wings, and so gently sustaining!
Have you not seen all that is needful has been
Sent by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend us;
Surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
If with his love he befriends us.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again;
Gladly forever adore him.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here, may our hearts be turned outward to the Other waiting to be family...

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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